BY THE AUTHOR OF "MR NOBODY" &c

# RECOLLECTIONS OF A COUNTRY DOCTOR

LONDON: J. & R. MAXWELL

Lilian Spender (1838-1895), novelist, was the daughter of a London doctor, and married Dr John Kent Spender of Bath.

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# THE
# RECOLLECTIONS OF A COUNTRY DOCTOR

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# THE RECOLLECTIONS

OF

# A COUNTRY DOCTOR

EDITED BY

## MRS. JOHN KENT SPENDER

AUTHOR OF "TRUST ME," "BOTH IN THE WRONG," "HER OWN FAULT," "MR. NOBODY," ETC. ETC.

"Raise me above the vulgar's breath,
Pursuit of fortune, fear of death,
And all in life that's mean;
Still true to reason be my plan,
Still let my actions speak the man,
Through every various scene."
AKENSIDE (*Physician*).

"On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered acts
Of kindness and of love."

LONDON

JOHN AND ROBERT MAXWELL

MILTON HOUSE, ST. BRIDE STREET, LUDGATE CIRCUS
AND
SHOE LANE, FLEET STREET, E.C.

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TO THE MEMORY OF A BELOVED FATHER,

EDWARD HEADLAND,

LATE OF UPPER PORTLAND PLACE,

WHO WAS FOR MORE THAN FORTY-FOUR YEARS ENGAGED IN EXTENSIVE PRACTICE IN LONDON,

This Work is Dedicated.

# EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

THERE are few people in whose society I have had greater pleasure than that of old Dr. Meredith, who was well known at a little place called Halstead-on-Sea, which, with the adjacent town of Blackquay, was much frequented at one time by invalids. He had lived through the greater part of the present century, and I thought it a privilege to be brought into close contact with him in his declining years. He was genial and kind-hearted, sometimes a little hot-tempered, quietly humorous at other times, occasionally whimsical in some of his ideas, and, as some of his enemies said, a trifle superstitious. His education had not been exclusively technical to the detriment of the intellectual, neither had his training deadened his sensibilities so as to allow them to become obtuse. Though outspoken in his manner (his enemies again said sometimes to roughness), he was a man of some culture, with a dread of vulgar utilitarianism, and an enthusiast for a profession which he held in higher esteem than mere earthly honours or profits. He was generally reticent about the people he had known, but by degrees it came out that he was familiar with many odd corners of human nature. One day he spoke to me of the strange experiences with which he had come in contact, and the secrets which had been entrusted to him by men and women who had passed into the "silent land."

"No one could be hurt if you told me a few of those stories *now*. You say that the actors are dead, and the names of some of them clean forgotten. Of course, in any case, you will not tell me the real names, or anything that could make *me*, a perfect stranger to the place, guess the reality of the people or their near relations. But you could easily alter all that, and yet relate a few of your experiences. It is these experiences from real life which one values. Could you not tell me a little about them, if I brought pen and paper, and tried to take down your very words?" I asked, coaxingly, one day.

"I think that some of them would not be believed. I cannot explain some things myself; *I wait to know.* And then others, interesting to myself, might fall very flat. I fancy, if Miss Mitford brought out her sketches about 'Our Village' now, the majority of young people would prefer more exciting novels," he answered, shaking his snowy locks.

Nevertheless, the idea had increasing attractions to us both. It would serve to distract my dear old friend from the recent grief, caused by separation from a beloved wife, with whom he had lived for nearly forty years, and it would enable me to practise the shorthand I had been trying to learn.

The difficulty was for the doctor to make a beginning. He had never been used to literature, and was afraid to discredit his habit of accurate thinking. But when I said to him, "Tell it to me just as if no one were listening," he would lose the consciousness of self, and speak with his usual vivacity.

I only hope that in submitting the stories he told me to a larger circle of hearers, I may succeed in interesting them as he interested me.

It struck me as he told them that they might suit different tastes.

Some of them are quiet. A few folks like myself, who prefer a quiet story to the more sensational ones just now in vogue, may choose to read these; others may skip them. Some of them are even religious, for the doctor, in his singleness of purpose, more than once quoted to me Bacon's prayer that "human things might not be allowed to prejudice such as were divine, neither that from the unlocking gates of sense, and the kindling of a natural light, anything of incredulity might arise in our minds towards divine mysteries." These I may mark with a foot-note, which may serve as a signpost for those who wish to avoid them. And a few—well, I should be inclined to call them "uncanny," had not Dr. Meredith quietly put down any such expression of opinion on my part by saying that, "if they could not be explained by our present stage of knowledge"—and he himself did not attempt to explain them—"it did not therefore follow that they were non-natural."

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# THE RECOLLECTIONS OF A COUNTRY DOCTOR

MY friends tell me that I have reached the Sabbatical period of life; that, having been for more than fifty years engaged in constant medical practice, it is time for me to rest, to meditate on the solemn crisis which must soon come to me—the "going over to the majority"—and to leave the arena of this world's contest open to younger and more active men. Privately, I do not believe in this period of rest as inconsistent with energy. I look upon it as an exploded idea, having always noticed that the men who get old the soonest are those who give in to old age. But, though the country life in which I have so long been occupied has lost much of its picturesqueness, I think it can never cease to be picturesque. It has no doubt altered greatly, owing to the migratory habits of modern times, and the London innovations shot into it by a system of railways and telegrams. Yet to me it is full of calm and elegiac memories. Of the men and women whom I used to know some thirty, forty, or even fifty years ago, not many are left alive. Sometimes when I walk over these desolate moors, or wander in breezy lanes leading to the sea, I am tempted to say, "All things are dead asleep that I have loved;" and then I pull myself up, remembering that the separate persons, who once were intimate with and confided their secrets to me, are living still, grafted only into closer union with things unseen. And as in my old-fashioned way I turn over the book of memory, marking the different episodes which have been interesting to myself, it occurs to me that there may be other men and women whom they may interest also.

It is true that I have passed that period of vigour when I trained myself to have few wants, to be as independent as

possible of the "cushions of life," and when all dreaminess and dawdling seemed to be incompatible with sustained work. True also that I can no longer take a prominent part in alleviating pain, or work any more mischief by ascribing fancied powers to my drugs. But to those who agree with me that the noblest study of mankind is man, and that the true physician should be able to fathom with fine and delicate touch not only the minds, but in some sense the very souls of his patients—not ignoring any of the problems of this complex human nature—I fancy I may have much to tell, omitting only those delineations of parts of human life which might be pronounced by outsiders to be "dry" and "stupid."

# THE OLD HOUSE ON THE CLIFF

## I.

WHEN I first settled in practice at Halstead-by-Sea I was young and strong. I could bear any amount of fatigue and exposure, I could out-walk and out-run many of the labourers in the neighbourhood; and it was well that I could do so, for a doctor in those days had to walk as well as ride. He might not only be summoned during the wettest and gloomiest nights, and have to ride alone in the darkness through stony and ill-kept roads which no dog-cart could pass; but there were paths across the moorland which no horse could reach.

Miles and miles away some of the little homesteads nestled, sheltering themselves as much as possible in the hollows of the hills. It was not often I was called to the people who lived in them. Some charlatan among themselves or some wise woman, whom long experience had trained, was usually ready to minister to their minor ailments. The air of the moor was in itself revivifying and medicinal. It was, therefore, with some surprise that I received one afternoon, not many years after I had settled at Halstead, a message summoning me instantly to a distant house on a steep cliff that I might minister to the necessities of Jack Deverish, or, as he was called in the village, "Black Jack."

Deverish was by no means popular, and had kept aloof from his neighbours. He had lived for years with an elder brother in retirement as absolute as if the two were hermits, and the elder brother Joram (I sometimes wondered if the name could be Jehoram) was said to be verging on idiotcy. The Halstead women-folk had been afraid to venture near

them, so that hitherto a crippled son of Joram, as ill-favoured as his progenitors, had been the only other inmate of the house. But, lately, when Joram had required more attention than Jack or Phil could give him, a wild sort of girl from the workhouse, whose independent ways had given much trouble to the authorities, had taken a situation with them, preferring their supervision to the hated interference of a mistress.

My wife did not approve of this, and it comes back to me, after the lapse of years, how thoughtful she was of every one, even of this scapegrace belonging to her own sex, whom other women had sent to the bad. I see her standing before me now, blue-eyed and fair-haired, with the pretty matronly air which became her so well, as she brushed the dust from my coat, saying:

"Never mind, Tom. It is provoking to be sent for now, just when you are tired with your other rounds. But who knows if there may not be a meaning in it? I do not like Molly being up there, but I have no excuse for getting her away, and there is no one like you, dear, for raking out the real rights and wrongs of things—and then that wretched Black Jack! Who knows if you might not do some good to *him!*"

Now, Black Jack was a desperate sceptic of the sneering and profane sort—for scepticism did not then take the polite and rather condescending form which it has adopted in these later days—and my wife was always fancying that I could "do good" to some one.

On that afternoon, when I was tired and a little out of temper, I did not take kindly to the idea. I could not help remembering that but a short time before, when I had offered to take a parson to the death-bed of a scamp, at my wife's urgent entreaty, the fellow had roused himself at the proposal, and had said, a little fiercely, looking antagonistically at me, "I be down in the mouth enuff a'ready." So I said nothing as I patted my wife's pretty cheek, and buttoned up my coat; for the weather was gusty and autumnal, and the wind would be keen across the moors.

"You won't be very late?" asked Jenny wistfully.

I answered her with a smile, as I set out with determined strides, anxious to get the business over as quickly as possible. My ill-temper was already abating as I went swiftly up to the moorlands, the wind cutting my face a little but invigorating my blood.

I have never had much sympathy with those devoted scientists who are delighted with shells, and snails, and are fired with enthusiasm about a polypus; but, on the other hand,

I have always been sorry for those numerous people who receive impressions upon the retina of the eye in an absent, helpless way, but do not really see half that men with quicker senses observe.

I had no occasion to pride myself specially on my powers of observation—indeed, I often said that my Jenny was the quicker of the two. But I had made myself acquainted with every farm, every cottage, and every landmark for miles round, and it often seemed to me that there was a human expression about some of the tumble-down old places, as if they had stories to tell, and as if some of them had suffered and rejoiced with their inmates. It was after all the study of humanity which was everywhere interesting to me, and as I trod that afternoon over the crisp herbage and the undulating stretches of ground, I was not thinking much of the ruminating cows and cropping sheep—which were the only vestiges of life in all those miles of pasturage—but of the hasty demand for assistance which had come to me from the proud, self-contained old man who was called Black Jack, like the cry of a soul in need.

"He du seem to be in torture," the child had said who brought the message. "He cries out at times that awful, that even Molly is afraid to go near him."

I had some curiosity about the old stone house which lodged the two brothers, and which I had never hitherto been invited to enter. It had been built in a massive way, four-square, and of the sturdy old granite which was found in the neighbourhood, as if to challenge with defiance the four winds which tussled on those heights. It contrasted oddly with the rotten bandboxes so often run up by modern contractors in the smaller and more sheltered streets of populous towns. So far, so good. The builder had done his work well; there was nothing blurred or unfinished about the workmanship. Indeed, it would have been hard to lay siege to the place. It was like its owners: something of the bull-dog type of house.

No one knew how it came into possession of the Deverishes, still less how it came to be built so high, or how the stone could have been worked at the very top of the cliff, and the foundations laid so strangely near the edge.

To speculate about such things came as little into the heads of the simple Halstead people, as our unorthodox modern ideas about landownership and church articles.

It was there, and that was enough; strangely in accord with its somewhat savage inmates; its surroundings seeming to be in keeping with the mysterious idea of endless successions of races, suggested not only by the stony strata in those battle-

ments of rock, but by the granite outposts surrounding the uncanny house, and the steep hill strewn with boulders on which it was perched.

The wind was raging fiercely across the fallows, and tearing at the few black fir-trees which stood like sentinels near the house, all bowing their heads, as it were, in deference to it, as they submitted obediently to be curved and driven by that blast. Some of the branches sobbed a little as if they were younger than the rest, and inclined to rebel against such discipline, while the shingly ground was strewn with spikelets from the blue-black vegetation. A few of the other twigs gave a sharp click as they caught at and rubbed each other; some groaned and others creaked as if they were gasping out their complaints; while the plaintive moan of the sea from beneath the cliff, which shelved sheer down to the coast, completed the chorus of melancholy music. A sort of fascination seemed to compel me to lean forward, and give a glance at the black rocks beneath. Ugh! How it made one shudder to look straight down from the precipitous heights of that iron-bound coast, and to catch sight of the slimy, orange-coloured seaweed fringing those sharp teeth far away on the beach! How the waves boomed against those tooth-like rocks, which were ready to transfix any hapless wretch who might be hurled against them. What a place it must have been for wreckers? My blood froze with horror as I thought of the ghastly tales of smugglers which had been told of Halstead years before, and how some of these tragedies were said to have taken place not far from that spot. Thank Heaven! the Deverishes, if they had been surly and stand-offish, and not always upright in their dealings, had at least, as far as I knew, been free from suspicion of *that* sort, pasturing their cattle peaceably on the moor.

I was roused by a sharp laugh, and, shaking myself out of my momentary reverie, saw a strange, deformed figure with which I was already familiar perched on the grass behind me, and pointing with increasing merriment at some object on the beach. He looked like a gnome with his small, hunchbacked form, and his round, staring eyes. Poor Phil! My wife was always kind to him, though he was like the Duke of Gloucester —said by his enemies not to be "formed for sportive tricks," or "to court the amorous looking-glass." He had been to school at Halstead, but had been left out in the cold as a child, because Joram would not own him, and he was said to have no name. A stronger child would not have moped, but Phil was a feeble child, with muscles never strong, nor joints supple; it was his fate to be left out of every game of play. Yet he had

an inborn fitness for taking care of himself, and for making the most of the small amusements which fell to his share. He was making the most of it now as he pointed gleefully to the beach, and to the agile figure which was disporting itself in the clear pools which were left where the tide had gone down between the wet, glistening rocks.

"She be sent to fetch you, and she be a-forgettin' all about it, and wettin' her feet and dancin' 'em, white and shinin', in and out o' the watter, like a murmaid's tail," he explained.

"That sounds like poetry," I said, as the boy whistled to the girl, who came clambering like a goat up the side of the cliff, where it was somewhat less steep, oblivious to scratches on her face and rents of her clothing.

"Gammon; who cares for poetry or such stuff?" sneered the cripple, as the girl climbed steadily up and stood before us at last, with her hair as black as midnight and her eyes as dark as sloes, while the brunette complexion had taken a brighter and warmer tint than her workhouse companions could ever have conjectured would be possible.

She laughed, too, as she looked at the roomy goloshes which had been sticking fast in the mud, and which she now held triumphantly in her hand.

"I shall be all the better without 'em," she explained. "And *he* won't hear us if we crawl along, but he be more nor half sorry as he sent for yer now, and the leastest noise it sounds to him like thunder."

My position was not a dignified one, but the circumstances were crushing, and my curiosity and sense of amusement began to outweigh my dignity. There was apparently nothing to do but to submit to be guided by these two hard-hearted young people, who piloted me through some partially tilled fields adjacent to the house, and kept carefully in the same furrow of the ploughed land that their footsteps should not show. It appeared to me that they cared little enough for the sick man; but I could not help overhearing their talk as the girl said to her companion, with a sort of shudder:

"I be that frightened of him at times that I feel as if I must run out and take a breath of somethin' wholesome."

"What should there be to frighten you, you used to be a plucky girl?" I asked, breaking in on their talk, and throwing a searching glance at Molly to see if she were joking.

She and Phil exchanged looks, and I noticed there was an absence of her usual pertness and elasticity of manner as she hung down her head and muttered:

"Ax some un else."

"I was only asking—or axing, as you call it," I repeated playfully—"what there should be to frighten you about a poor old sick man?"

She dropped her voice as she gazed up in a terrified way at the old stone house, gray and ghost-like through the fir-trees.

"Some ses as the devil hev got hold o' him," she answered.

"Be dazed if I believe such trumpery trash!" exclaimed the cripple, with an assumption of bravery and superior indignation which might have been expected from his school education.

The ground was ill-kept. The attempt which had been made to reclaim it from the surrounding desolation had not been very successful. Stones were scattered here and there, even in the ploughed field, and as we cleared a rough stile, which Phil crept over with difficulty, we had to pick our way through a stream of water and over water-worn stones.

It was growing dusk. The shade of the fir-trees was deepening. A planet—I think it was Jupiter—was beaming opposite us in the sky, when the girl asked abruptly, holding up her finger:

"D'ye hear it? Do that waterfall sound like the chiming o' bells to yer? Do it now?" she demanded, with eager and startling curiosity.

I listened. But the waterfall, as she called it, a little stream of water running down from the hill, sounded merely like a feeble trickle as it rippled over the stones.

"What kind of bells?" I asked, with another amused smile.

"Like a tollin'," she said excitedly; "*he* hears it all hours o' nights."

"Ah! I see—some trick of the imagination. He thinks he hears death-bells?"

She nodded.

"And a screemin' from the waves of the sea, like a woman's voice screeching. D'ye think it can be any way right and natural for him not only to hear sich things, but to make *me* hear 'em at times, too?"

She spoke sharply, and with that preternatural acuteness which had set the workhouse matron against her.

"Stoopid!" ejaculated the cripple.

I answered vaguely, speaking more to myself than to Molly: "There may be many things which we do not at present understand, of which it would be premature for us to determine that they are not natural."

She pressed her hand to her eyes.

"I be that freighted," she muttered again, while the boy burst into a fit of harsh, uncontrolled laughter. He was always

either chuckling over one piece of mischief, or meditating another; a mixture of impish enjoyment and intense cunning, and I confess I began to suspect the boy. She was a girl of good courage, and yet she had evidently to rally herself as she led the way through the sturdy doorway into the kitchen, where there was burning a huge peat fire, with Joram sitting in the ingle-nook, and cowering over the blaze.

He had a big clasp-knife in his hand, and a lump of bread with bacon. But his appetite had apparently failed him, and he sat surveying the bread as if he had forgotten the right way to carry it to his mouth. He rose up as we entered, as if the sight of me had touched the spring of some forgotten train of thought. For, after gazing at me in a dazed, stupefied way, he became unexpectedly aggressive, and flourished his fist at me.

"I jest find out what's yer little game," he said, with a threatening grin.

I knew better than to show any signs of fear, though the blade of the knife glittered unpleasantly in close proximity to my throat.

"Polite to the faculty!" chuckled Phil, behind me.

He had picked up some words in that school-teaching at Halstead. As for Molly, she took no notice of the interruption, but quietly made her way for the other door, which communicated with the staircase.

"It doesn't make much difference what he says; he is quite harmless," she remarked with stolid indifference, as the old man rose with difficulty to his full height. In his time, he had been massive and broad of build, as well as tall; and it was pitiful to see how he collapsed again on the wooden settle in a state of helpless incapacity. He still glared at me when the little episode was over, but the direct and continued gaze with which I confronted his threatening look seemed at last to disarm his animosity.

"He can't abear for any one to come in here," explained the girl. "'Taint 'speckful; but it's jist his way."

"If I thought that gent'man would tell about wot's not his bisness, I'd crack his skull; I would — like a nut," muttered Joram to himself, with an evident lingering of his antagonistic instincts.

In another minute, he had remembered his bread and bacon, and, once beginning to eat, ate voraciously.

It was evidently a household in which the aboriginal principles of human nature remained uninterfered with. The Sabbath decade of human life was not at its pleasantest here.

I was to see another specimen of it yet. I prided myself on

my admiration for everything antique, and yet I confess that, as Molly showed me into the bedroom, I began to feel my antiquarianism at its lowest ebb, and decided that, on the whole, I should much prefer a bedroom in one of the gimcrack villa residences in the neighbourhood of St. John's Wood or Regent's Park. The huge oak rafters of the ceiling, the gloomy, unlit corners, with the moon shining in at the window with a weird and pearly light, were mysterious and solemn enough to any one who had not sufficient mental stability to resist the shifting impressions born of loneliness and darkness. I wished myself well outside again on the lonely path across the moor, which I knew would be bright in the moonlight, instead.

In the centre of the room was a bed which looked like a hearse with a huge dark canopy, and in it the figure of a man, who started digging his thin elbows into the bed, and lifting himself up by a sudden effort of will, as I entered the room.

"Doctor!" he exclaimed, in a hoarse voice in which anger was predominant, "you don't mean to say you were mad enough to send for a doctor—that you were fools enough to take my sick ravings for earnest?"

"I must be a little out of tone—I'll have a good long walk to-morrow, doctor," he added, with an attempt at civility, as I silently took a chair by his side, and noticed that he sank in a weary way back on his pillow.

"I have had a long walk myself, and must rest a little before I go," I tried to answer soothingly.

He started again, making another effort to sit up. But his face now was pale as ashes; his eyes like live coals. A sudden change had passed over him, a change for which I could not account.

"Some men looking in as usual on us," he gasped, pointing at the window. "Can't they *ever* leave us alone?"

I rose and drew the old curtain, excluding the moonlight, and resumed my seat, attempting to take his hand.

He was unaware of my touch. A cold perspiration was breaking out from every pore of his skin. If ever I saw the phenomenon of the hair being lifted from the brow, so that it might be said in exaggerative language to stand on end, I saw it then.

He was clutching at something, as Macbeth clutched the phantom dagger.

"Look at him! Look! There is blood on his side. Can I never be free from him—*never?*"

I shrank, as the girl had done before me, from the man's

white, scared look, his laboured breath, his more than mortal anguish.

"It was nervousness," I declared to myself; "nothing more."

"Don't you see?" he gasped, as if resentful of contradiction, and yet hopeful that what he saw should prove on a scientific investigation to be a mere hallucination of his senses.

"No, really," I answered; "I can't say that I do; but then," I added, with a desperate attempt to turn the thing into a joke, "you know some people are said not to see an inch beyond their own noses."

"Never saw anything plainer in my life, and I've seen him, on and off, for the last thirty year," he groaned, speaking as if to himself, and yet relieved to find that he was alone in his weird believing.

"Don't you think it was fancy?" I replied, attempting another laugh.

"No, I 'ave seen 'im for thirty year and more, but never so plain as I do now."

To the girl Molly I was graver as I left the house an hour afterwards.

"Is there anything in the place to hang a guess upon, anything to account for these sights and sounds?" I asked, as we walked into the kitchen where old Joram had fallen into deep sleep, and where now, without fear of fresh molestation, it was possible to light a fire with sticks to boil the kettle. I was conscious of a cold, shivering feeling, like icy water running down the spine, for which it was difficult to account; conscious also of a slight sensation of relief when the girl answered me with evident truthfulness that she knew of nothing. "Good," I said, "that clears the ground. It is probably simply a case of nervousness from long confinement in a solitary place. You must keep all your common-sense about you."

"I shouldn't mind if it wasn't for them thumps on the rafters; there is nothing outside to make 'em. Old Joram, he used to insist it were rubbish, but now he's a silly, his brother be ravin'."

"Well, you take my advice. Get Phil to hunt out the rats and you'll hear no more noises," I said, as I prepared for my bleak walk back over the moor. It was a little disheartening to find the next morning that my wife was not so pleased as I was myself with my good advice about common-sense; but then there is no understanding women, they have so many theories and topsy-turvy ways of looking at things.

"Common-sense, indeed!" said my wife, tossing her little

head. *She* had no opinion of that sort of common-sense which was always pointing its finger of scorn at everything which its own shallowness could not fathom. "As if," continued Jenny, looking saucily at me, "the men and the women who were so fond of talking grandly about common-sense had most of them any sense to boast of at all."

But Jenny was only a woman without philosophical training, though all the dearer and more charming to me for her foolish and inconsistent little fancies; and I did not think much of the occurrences of the night in the healthy sunshine of the following morning. I had prescribed the usual remedies, seeing that there was no occasion to be alarmed about the man. He had no disease. People do not die without some legitimate cause, and there could be no possible reason to remove him to a madhouse on account of a few nervous fancies. So I returned to the realities of this sublunary world with a mind toned down to its every-day matters.

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## II.

It was a little annoying a few days afterwards to hear that Jack Deverish was still writhing—not in physical agonies, but in such tortures as the Greeks had invented for their Tartarus and Dante in more modern times for the wretches in his hell.

No doubt the mind was reacting on the body. But it was discrediting to my skill and to the cleverness of my surmises. For Phil had been to see me, and informed me that nothing could have been more futile than his search for rats. The stonework of the house was so impregnable, and every part of it was so well built, and had been kept so well in order, that there was no habitat for rats. At my suggestion the roof had been thoroughly examined, but the rafters had been kept painted, and the roof itself was strongly slated.

My remedies had been a complete failure; the patient was day by day losing strength. There was nothing to account for it, and I was inclined to feel angry as well as perplexed when, a day or two afterwards, I was summoned as urgently as before.

It was again late in the afternoon, and the autumn had set in in real earnest. The mists were common at Halstead-on-Sea when we reached the end of September. The advance of the season showed itself everywhere. The bracken was beginning to turn, and the little heather of which we could boast was already sodden and faded, as I again buttoned up my great-coat,

and made my way, with hasty steps, past the river, which flowed down into the sea, towards the more distant moor. The river was already turbid and swollen, and I missed the loosestrife which but a short time before had been empurpling its banks. A few blossoms of the moneywort still glittered in golden glory. I remember looking at them with some regret as I set out for the heights. For I knew what was to follow, from previous unpleasant experiences. The mists, when I climbed the hill, enveloped me in a Turkish bath, and there was the additional discomfort of being apt to stumble, because one could not see the ground beneath one's feet.

To add to all this, I was unusually depressed. I scarcely think that we doctors attach enough importance to the atmospheric influences which affect bodily health. For my part, I could never ignore these influences on my patients, as I was a little ashamed of being more or less sensitive to them myself. To some men the vision of joy never seems to have been given; for others the veil of sadness is only lifted at times, and, when the sense of fall or failure is on them, the morbid depression has to be grappled with.

I remember the strange, spectral forms of the clouds that misty afternoon, which seemed to be like disembodied spirits hovering over me. I recall the oppressive silence, unbroken by cry of bird or low of cattle, as if all nature were asleep, and how the restless and undying sobbing of the sea seemed to fill up the aching void of this unnatural silence. There was no moving water to be seen from the cliffs, with broken and ever-shifting lights. The sea was blotted out. It was dangerous walking, for you could not guess where the precipitous heights shelved down abruptly to the shingly beach, and the fringe of orange seaweed round the wet, tooth-like rocks beneath had ceased, like everything else, to exist.

More than once I had to retrace my steps before I could find the steep hill of boulders leading towards the stone house, or catch sight of the now gray-looking plantations of firs, which seemed to have stiffened into strange, unnatural shapes as they loomed through the darkness. There was no breeze for them to sob in now, but they still seemed to be importunate as they beckoned me forward with stiffened fingers, as if they were sentinels to this weird house, which held a secret of some sort, and insisted on my sharing it.

"It is an essentially unscientific attitude to refuse to investigate anything. You ought to remember that, Tom," Jenny had said to me that afternoon. "You will never be able to help that poor, tortured fellow-creature if you go to him with stiff, starchy,

preconceived notions. 'There are more things in heaven and earth,' you know, 'than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'"

She was proceeding, when I interrupted her a little snappishly.

"For Heaven's sake," I said, "spare me such hackneyed quotations."

I tried to put Shakespeare out of my mind as I climbed the boulders which led to the old house. In fact, I had long ago decided of Shakespeare that—great mind as his was—he was ridiculously superstitious. So was Lord Bacon, and so Sir Thomas Browne—in fact, nearly the whole lot of the men of that age. We of the enlightened nineteenth century had outgrown them. And yet how was it that on that misty afternoon I was more than ever convinced that there was an essential mystery at the heart of all things which no science could explain?

Close by the fir-trees I met the girl, Molly. I saw at once that something had disturbed her, and that she had altered greatly in the few days since I had seen her. Her healthy complexion had grown pale, almost sallow, or else it was the effect of the mist which had deprived her of her natural colour. Her head was wrapped up in an old plaid shawl, which also enveloped her shoulders, but yet she shivered. I began to wonder that she, in her splendid state of bodily health, should be so easily affected by the dampness of the air, especially as she wore a woollen dress, and her feet were now covered by the goloshes. At the same time I speculated whether it were possible that the mist could have imparted that appearance of added size to her already large black eyes, taking away the keenness from them and giving them a restless look.

It struck me that she had grown from a girl into a woman, and that there was a look in those eyes as if she wished to speak to me confidentially. She gave a searching glance round, as if to be sure there were not any listeners, and then came a step nearer with that expression still in her eyes, as if she were intending to say: "Please let what I tell you go no further. It is private between ourselves."

But, whatever her original intention might have been, she swerved from it with a woman's ready appreciation of the difficulties which might follow, as a low, steady whistle was heard behind the fir-trees.

"That is Phil," she said. "He is watching for us."

As I afterwards discovered, Phil, who was but a few yards off, and whose curiosity was irrepressible, had been dogging her footsteps. But it was impossible to perceive him in that foggy, slate-coloured mist, which might have been painted in a wash of Indian ink, wiped out, just where we stood, with blotting-paper.

'He a-been expectin' of ye this long while, and them noises been a-goin' on worse than ever," explained the cripple, as he led the way gingerly through the kitchen, being careful not to awake old Joram, who was now fast asleep in the ingle-nook, thus saving me from another irritating experience of the unvarnished simplicity of the septuagenarian's manners.

Jack Deverish had been nicknamed "Black," less from a sort of vague ill-repute which rested on no definite accusation, than from the darkness of his sun-browned skin and the blackness of his hair. He was in reality ten years younger than his brother; but he began to look almost as old as Joram as he lay in his canopied bed. His skin, of the colour of parchment now that it had lost the healthy tan, hung on his cheeks in folds. His eyes were sunken in their sockets, and the black hair and beard, still but sparsely sprinkled with gray, added to the ghastly appearance of his face. At the moment of my entering the room he seemed to have a brief respite from the horrors from which he had suffered for days, though even then the fear of something more terrible than death was evident in his drawn features and the set expression of the face.

"The battle be well-nigh over," he said; "doctor, I've been a-tellin' him it can't last much more."

"What is over?" I asked incredulously.

"The struggle between us two. He hev a right to his revenge, there's no gainsaying that anyway; but even he'll soon know I can't hold out much more. We two 'll be together soon. It can't be worse than it is now."

"You must not talk of its being over. A man does not die of nothing, and a man of your wonderful strength," I rejoined, remembering how carefully I had examined him, and could diagnose nothing wrong.

It seemed right to try to comfort him with some of the cheery stoicisms which, even from my student days, I had been taught to utter in a sick-room. I had no time to waste in intricacies or theories. The man was evidently exhausted. His bodily health had been shattered in some great spiritual battle. He was certainly sinking, though my stethoscope was at fault when I attempted to find out anything the matter. And yet he had taken food, and had never indulged in too much alcohol.

"Don't try to speak, it will only weaken you," I said hurriedly, as I again saw his face convulsed as with terror, and he seemed to be pointing behind me as if at something terrible.

The quantum of exertion was not great, but I saw it was necessary for me to forbid it.

"Don't speak," I said sternly; "there is nothing to talk about."

He made an effort to obey me; and, in the anguished silence which followed, we could again hear the undying sobbing of the sea—the acme of all dismal sounds—as the waves beat against the cliffs. But the "vassal soul," so nearly emancipated from the flesh, was no longer to be conquered by the tyrant body.

"I've seed 'un as plain as ever," he said solemnly, "and the blood is on him still—never dried that blood—nor more than the knockings have ceased—not for years and years."

At that moment I could almost have fancied I heard a scream which made my limbs tremble and my breath come fast.

Superstitious terrors are infectious, and I tried to ask, in my most jocular tone:

"Do folks play practical jokes with speaking-tubes in this house?"

No one answered, by which I inferred, to my self-satisfaction, that the sound I had heard was merely subjective, and that a more elastic nature than mine would never have been infected by such ridiculous terrors.

"Where do you see him now?" I asked, still speaking cheerily, and thinking that it might be better to try to humour his sick fancy.

"Sitting on the chair behind ye," he said, with a shudder, fixing his piteous gaze on the spot which he indicated, with no more attempt to hide his own desperate condition.

In spite of my philosophy I was conscious of a wish that the phantom which he saw had not been in such close proximity.

But I forced myself to place my hand on the spot, as if to convince him that the second chair was an optical delusion.

"You see it is all nonsense; there is nothing there," I said.

"Your hand goes through him," he answered, shaking his head, "but he be there all the same. He 'ave told me that my time is short, and he be bound to be watchin'. It can't be wuss than it is now."

As I listened I thought of the sinister suspicions, undefined and apparently meaningless, which had always attached to the two old brothers.

"The mills of God grind slowly," darkly, and in subtle ways. Yet, if the wretched inuendoes had been any of them true, sooner or later the punishment might have been expected to come. And, whatever the spectral visitation might be, the man was evidently worn out with fighting against it.

He was dying, in spite of all the resources of my art. The

soul would soon be emancipated from the trammelling body. Was it possible that, on the borderland between matter and spirit, it already saw sights which we could not see?

I tried the strongest restoratives, but with no success.

Jack Deverish was addressing some one whom I could not see. It was as if he was appealing to some invisible tribunal, and as if he, who in his former life had been proud and blasphemous, was now abjectly repentant and entreating.

His voice had sunk to a whisper, but every word he uttered fell clearly on my ears. His troubled eyes were fixed with a piteous, imploring glance on the spot where I had tried to convince him there was nothing. He was still evidently the victim of that optical delusion. So I said to myself, dismissing the idea as wild and mad that what he saw might be in some way existent.

"I never meant to do it," he said, addressing the imaginary figure; "you *know* as I never did—it were forced upon me like. I mind all about that night—'cos it has allus been afore me since. I can mind it as well as if it were yesterday. I can see them now, every man jack of 'em. It was them as carried you in—and we all thought as you was dead. It was only after we took the gold—and you opened yer eyes and called us 'thieves'—that I struck at you with a knife. I was desperate like."

His voice ceased for a minute, but Phil was applying the restoratives which I had ordered. No entreaties could induce Molly to enter the room, and in another instant he gave a deep sigh and made a fresh effort to speak. My hand was now on his pulse, but the throb was so faint that I could hardly distinguish it. It was only by leaning over him that I could catch the last syllables:

"It is equal between us, anyways; you have had your revenge. Day and night, night and day, no rest from your noises. You will drag me down body and soul."

I roused myself at these words, remembering Jenny's advice.

"No!" I shouted into his ears. "I protest against *that*. No creature in earth or hell can have power to drag down a repentant soul."

And then I appealed to him by the sacred name—not to be proclaimed on the housetops or shouted aloud in the streets—which, layman as I was, I had more than once found effective in the hour of utmost peril and need. Whatever his sins might have been, I had still a right to appeal to him by that name. He turned to me at first with a gesture of impatience, and then

—did I imagine it?—something like moisture came into the eyes which were already glazing, as if the rugged rock had been dissolved by some memory that had been recalled by my words, and would have been ready, under other circumstances, to gush out into healing tears.

He drew another laboured breath; but it was a breath almost of relief.

"Mother!" he whispered, striving to lift his hand and pass it over his eyes, with the sudden energy which is sometimes given to the dying. "Mother!" he gasped again, wearily and exhausted. Was he thinking of the time when, as a little child, he had said a prayer at his mother's knee? Some recollection seemed to be striving to force itself through his clouded brain.

I was worn out with much work, with the fatigue of my sleepless night, and, above all, by the mental effort of struggling with this difficult case which had proved so baffling to my skill. I was no doubt becoming stupefied myself, or I should not have imagined that I heard a soothing voice. A woman's voice, and Molly not in the room, speaking softly and gently close to the pillow over which I was leaning. And then—those waves of the Atlantic, which, just when the wind had risen again and the tide was high, came booming against the massive cliff, sounded almost metallic at times, and played us strange tricks! But I could have sworn that a scream which made one's blood run cold rang through the room. I have tried hard to argue myself into common-sense about it since, and yet I never have been able to decide to my own satisfaction whether that shriek came from the dying man, or whether my imagination cozened me, as it did once before, when I listened to the sea.

All I know is that for an instant I did not venture to look, and, when I did so again, my patient lay there *dead*—there was nothing more for me to do.

I left Phil in the room. He was subdued by the power of that solemn death, and ready to do what was necessary for the dead. It was a relief to inhale a breath of the fresh, pure night air. The earth was no longer swathed in clouds of mist. The rising wind had dispersed the mist, and as I looked at the skies above me teeming with innumerable worlds—the immensities, as Carlyle calls them—our human fears and discords seemed to dwindle into less importance. I was inclined to think of the life which had just gone as of but a single leaf in an illimitable forest. There they were—all up—thousands—tens of thousands—twenty millions of worlds—tempting one to think that the repentance of a single fellow-creature could be of but little importance where everything dwindled into insignificance.

Some one else was looking at them. A girl with her head wrapped in a woollen shawl, and her eyes gleaming beneath. I could not help noticing again that those eyes had greatly gained in intelligence, and that Molly, who had usually been so pert and forward, was now evidently trembling.

"I waited to speak wi' ye, when ye were alone," she said. "I wanted to say what I couldn't say before—as there is another dead man unburied somewhere in that house. I dreamt once that he was a-lyin' in an old coach-'ouse, with a knife by his side—and a 'ole which the knife had made in it. Then I dreamt it again as clear as before. Only this time the coach-'ouse was walled up, and the corpse had turned to bones. Tek me away, tek me away wi' yer," she implored; "I can't stay no more in this place. I wants to learn summat good. I used to hate church or chapel—Methodists I called them all who went to sich places—but I wants to go there now mysel'." And the girl shuddered in that way which was so new to her. It was evident that her nervous system was deranged.

I acceded to her request, though of course I laughed at her about her dreams. Nothing was more likely than that a girl, becoming nervous and hysterical in such an outlandish house, should dream such dreams.

I found it useless to argue with her, and so I took her home with me, and for once had to knock Jenny up, to give the poor creature a bed.

I need scarcely say that Jenny, always looking at the bright side of things, saw a hopeful opportunity to work on this raw material. She had long hoped to make a useful member of society of this poor outcast, Molly.

It was found that Black Jack had made a will in favour of the cripple, and, after the funeral was over, Phil surprised us all by stoutly refusing to remain with old Joram, and requiring that the latter should be moved to an idiot asylum. Oddly enough, when a search was made, sufficient money was found concealed beneath the bed to enable Phil to pay for the old idiot at a private asylum, while sufficient remained to supply his own needs. The cripple decided to let the house, after having the old man removed. A matter of some difficulty, on account of Joram Deverish's almost feline sort of attachment to his own pet Lares. But the step seemed to be necessary, as he was becoming dangerously violent.

And now the strange part of my story remains to be told. On the premises being remodelled, a wall was taken down, and a skeleton was discovered lying behind it, with a rusty knife by its side. The only portion of the clothing which was in a state

to be examined was a strong leathern pouch, which had evidently been worn round the neck of the murdered man, and which had probably contained gold. On consulting some antiquarians, who took an interest in old manuscripts connected with facts of interest in the county, I was informed that the house had once been an inn, which had fallen into ill-repute on account of some reports that its owner had had dealings with smugglers. At one time it had boasted a coach-house, but the stabling had been walled up long ago. On inquiry, I found that the date at which the stable had last been heard of was said to be at least forty years before. Since then the house had been rarely visited, and the rumours had been more or less forgotten. Thirty-five years or more must have elapsed since any of these rumours had threatened to injure the reputation of the Deverishes.

What purpose could be accomplished by raking them up again? Would my assurances have been believed if the case had been taken before a court of law? Jack Deverish had already been summoned before a higher tribunal, and as to his brother Joram, it was too late to see him in the dock as a prisoner. There was of course no proof that the gold which had been found stored away in Black Jack's canopy-bed was the same as that which had once been in the leathern pouch.

No one connected the Deverishes, except in the vaguest way, with the discovery of the skeleton. No one guessed that they knew anything about it, and this is the first time that I have ever dared to relate what I know. I might add that some years afterwards, when an architect was employed to examine the cellars of the house, a subterranean passage was discovered which communicated with the beach. It has since been filled in, in accordance with the architect's advice. And to have had such a story circulated from mouth to mouth and published possibly in the London papers would at that time have been a great annoyance to the respectable farmer who had purchased the property.

# ADELA BOLTON'S CONQUEST

## I.

THERE are few matters in which I have lived to see a greater change than in the way in which theatrical performances are looked upon by those who are said to belong to the respectable classes. Such a tribute as that accorded lately by a Lord Chief Justice to the high and pure influence of a celebrated English actor, and the mingling which society and the stage have undergone, would have been incompatible with the spice of novelty bordering on wickedness which in the earlier part of the century attracted men of birth and fortune to the green-room, leading on more than one occasion to romantic and unconventional marriages. The preachers of Puritanism in my day were as jealous as Bossuet had been two centuries before in attacking the stage with the fiercest hostility. It is not for me to say whether they or Cardinal Manning are right in denouncing the histrionic art, from the "Italian opera to the penny gaff, as but a link in one long devil's chain."

It is not for me to give an opinion. I have merely to tell a tale.

At the commencement of one long, lingering winter, about thirty years ago, when a fall of snow had fallen early in the season, "fashioning a shroud for autumn's burial ere her pulse was numb," when people were already beginning to cower by their firesides, dreading the steely frost, it was a pleasant surprise to hear that a London melodramatic company, making a tour in the provinces, had made their appearance at Blackquay. Our little line of rail had not been laid in those days, and we had to drive the distance in carriages. But the carriages were

comfortable and cozy on a winter's night; and to some of us, who were pining from an absolute want of recreation, there was all the pleasure of stolen fruit in driving quietly over to Blackquay, and returning again with solemn faces just as if nothing had happened.

The London company was not a celebrated one. People were beginning to complain, as they do now, of the dearth of good actresses; in fact, I can never remember when they did not complain of that dearth, and I feel sure that if they could resuscitate the ghost of Mrs. Siddons they would be ready to find out some flaw in her acting. This is, perhaps, as it should be; we can scarcely be too fastidious about the excellence of "an art which doth mend nature." But the Blackquay people were not hard to please. They could appreciate vivacity and natural grace, and were loud in the praise of a certain young actress, who had been born, as it were, in the profession, and trained from childhood to youth, until she had gradually been trusted with the most effective and difficult parts.

"Come, doctor, you must go with us. It will do you no harm to go for once; you seldom have a holiday from year's end to year's end, and all work and no play, you know——"

The speaker, who was a genial fellow, and not prone, like some people, to wrap himself in fogs and believe that it was dark and dreary everywhere, did not finish his sentence, but looked smilingly at me.

It was perhaps the most embarrassing way of taking advantage of me; for, though I did not feel bound to enlarge on my own prejudices to other people, I must confess they were at that time rather unfavourable to the stage.

"Now, doctor, must I quote against you the very words you have used to *me*—that it won't do to take advantage of Nature, and bind her and fetter her so as to have things all your own way? In the long run, Dame Nature will compel you to have some recreation. She has her own methods, as I have heard you say, of balancing her accounts."

It is rather awkward to have one's words misquoted against oneself; and to tell the truth, as Jenny was paying a visit just then, there *was* a lugubrious sort of monotony about my daily drudgery.

So I agreed to go with paterfamilias, who was taking his wife and a couple of olive-branches in an old-fashioned sort of family coach. I have often been told that I have a spice of superstition about me, and I could never help feeling that my visit to Blackquay that night was not optional on my part. It was to be.

The little comedy went remarkably well. The very supers

did their duty; and as to Adela Bolton, one could tell, without knowing her history, that she was no neophyte.

She had spirit and pathos as well as vivacity, and as the melodrama which she was acting called forth all these varied qualities, she elicited laughter and tears from her easily satisfied country audience. The upholstery was certainly somewhat ridiculous, and the shifting of the ill-painted scenes left much to be desired. But this only amused us the more. We were ready to make excuses for all provincial deficiencies, and to condone all minor defects as we listened to the actress, whose impersonation of tender effusion and passionate fervour reached its highest pitch in a scene which was intended to be one of picturesque horror. This scene represented a burning cottage, in which lurid tongues of fire were seen darting from the roof, and in which the heroine, ascending a ladder, attempted to rescue a mother and child who made a pathetic appeal to passers-by, most of whom were too cowardly to help. It was intended to be a village scene, with no firemen near at hand, and the stolid nature of the country bumpkin was to be illustrated by a certain Hodge, who was gallant enough to hold a ladder, but would not venture his precious head into closer contact with the flames.

"Now for the richest thing of all — a Blackquay scene-painter's representation of a fire," whispered my facetious friend, nudging me, as a piece of orange-coloured drapery, backed by some yellow muslin, was beginning to exhibit queer contortions at the chimneys and the roof. In another moment I heard him say, with muffled breath, 'By Jove, that is not bad!"

My eyes followed the direction of his, and for one terrible instant I felt as if my pulses stood still. A current of air, from some unlucky mistake in the arrangements, must have blown the yellow drapery until a part of it had come in contact with gas jets which were intended to illuminate the background. I said not a word, remembering that a panic was at all cost to be avoided.

But meanwhile those were real flames which were ascending from the chimneys, and it could only be a question of time before those flames reached the window. A woman's hysterical cry—long, loud, heart-thrilling, and curdling the blood with horror—rang through the house. It came from the mother who was holding the infant. But it caused no alarm among the audience, who looked upon it as a wonderful feat of realism in the programme. In another moment the theatre rang with plaudits, for the actress who had hastily rescued the child returned with marvellous rapidity for the screaming mother,

and dragged her in a dead faint to the foot of the ladder. It must have been a marvellous effort on the part of a fragile girl, whose figure was lithe and slender. I could see how she tottered under the weight and almost fell into the arms of the terrified Hodge, as both let the woman lie in a *real* swoon at the foot of the ladder. It seemed to be a piece of superhuman acting. But at the same time streams of water from pails behind the scene were brought to bear on the yellow muslin, and Hodge —still dragging rather than lifting his fainting burden—disappeared by the side scenes. The illusion was destroyed.

Then rose the terrified cry—I had almost said the yell—from innumerable throats of "Fire, fire!" No one knew better than I did that there were but two modes of egress from that crowded building, and that the most horrible catastrophe was imminent. Already there was a stamping of feet, a rustling of draperies. Already the ordinary laws of courtesy were being forgotten as people pushed past each other in the agony of that dread. In a few minutes civilisation would be forgotten, and the "wild beast" would be uppermost. I gave up all for lost; but meanwhile my eyes were riveted on the young and fearless actress, standing alone, surrounded by the blazing drapery, and caressing the little child, who, forgotten during the mother's fainting fit, was now in the actress's arms. Her voice, which had been flute-like before, had now gained in volume and strength. Stupefied and aghast myself, I wondered at the young actress's extraordinary self-possession, as, raising her arm to enforce attention, she called in a commanding voice, which rang through the building and startled the people who had risen to fly, but as yet, with few exceptions, had not had time to leave their seats.

"Stay, I entreat you," she cried, as she held the wonder-stricken spectators for a moment or two spell-bound by her voice. "For God's sake, remain still. There is nothing to be afraid of—we have plenty of water at hand. If danger threatens any one, it is myself and this child. But see, I am not afraid. I will not stir from this spot, though I know perfectly well that the flames must devour us both before they can do any harm to you. If you yield to panic, your own lives and ours *must* be lost. See, I appeal to you by this little one—fathers—and mothers."

Acting, I have been told, is the most artificial of things, and when we say "How natural!" in commending some finished work of art, we are really speaking falsely, for the imitation of nature is not natural. It may be that the thrilling intonation with which the woman made her appeal was the result of second nature or of studious habit. But, whatever it was, it had an

electric effect on the audience. What a sight it was merely to look at her as she held the child strained to her heart, and *waited*—determined not to forsake her post! It is one of the sights which I can never forget. The gleaming of the little feet, and the white drapery which veiled her form (for it was a part of the situation in the play to suppose that she had been aroused from sleep by her neighbour's cries for help), are photographed on my memory, as well as the heaving of her bosom beneath the folds of her dress, and the convulsive pressure of her hand as she strained the child to herself.

"She is but a weak woman, after all," I said to myself, at the same time that I noted the control which could be exercised by one dominant spirit for the moment over the wills of a multitude. She had appealed consciously or unconsciously to all that was manliest in manhood and noblest in womanhood. Instinctively the men grasped the hands of their wives, and the mothers tried to arrest the movements of the younger ones. For one awful minute all was perfectly still. There was no rushing up and down, no excitement, no cries. The nerves which had been wrought upon so suddenly by this unexpected danger were again under control.

The actress did not look round. She could not know as we did how the truth of her words was being attested, and that the flames were already less terrific. It was the manager of the theatre who first came to her assistance, assuring us that the danger had ceased, and taking her hand to lead her out, as he apologised for the disaster. Strange to say, so strong is the power of habit, even at that moment she retired with the accustomed stage walk, and did not forget the conventional curtsey. As soon as my gaze was diverted from the fixed and somewhat strained look of her large lustrous eyes, I could not help noticing the touching expression of many faces in the crowd, which was moving slowly at its accustomed pace; then I suddenly felt a hand touch my arm. It was the touch of a man who knew me.

"They want a doctor," he said.

"Want a doctor?" I repeated anxiously. Then the reaction had come.

It would be impossible to attempt to describe the confusion behind the scenes. Men and women were standing about in dishevelment and disarray.

Some of the girls were sobbing still, and their tears had made ghastly channels through the rouge on their pale faces. They had forgotten to change their petticoats, which I was old-fashioned enough to wish could have been of a better length. The men who hung about had a hang-dog look, as if, now that

the catastrophe was over and they had not taken a more heroic part in it, they wished to treat it as an episode which was comparatively insignificant. A few had taken their departure directly the flames were extinguished, but the rest of them lingered from sheer kindheartedness, looking sad in their *déshabille*. I saw directly that the right thing would be to clear the apartment.

"Too many nurses are worse than too many cooks," I said, as I advanced to the sofa, on which was the recumbent figure of a woman, whose dress was much disordered, and who was apparently in the last extremity of suffering. The floor of the room in which she lay was soaked with water, and the blackened drapery and some charred wood were reminders of what had happened.

I saw at a glance that it was not Adela Bolton, whose nerves, I began to think, must be made of iron, as, so far from becoming hysterical, she was ministering to the invalid. It was, in fact, the mother of the child. A widow, as one of her friends explained to me, whose husband had taken some of the minor parts in connection with the company, and had died but recently, leaving his wife and little daughter totally unprovided for. The good-natured manager had refused to turn the woman adrift, and it had been, as I afterwards heard, at Adela's request that the part had been allotted to her in the scene of "the burning cottage." It was simply the part of a lay figure.

That there was little hope of the poor creature's recovery I saw at a glance; also that she was in a condition which should have exempted her from any such shock as that to which she had been subjected.

Perhaps it was as well that she should not live to give birth to a posthumous infant. At any rate there was nothing to be done.

"She will die," I whispered to one of the actors.

Her pulse was rapid, her temperature abnormally high, her breathing panting and quick. She was delirious, and had been so ever since she was rescued—babbling, like Falstaff, of "green fields." Her wild words, her rapid voice, her eager questionings were all less painful to witness in the utter bewilderment of her mind than the enlightenment which came just before the *animula blandula vagula* took its flight. For then, stretching out her arms, she asked for her little girl, and sat up, weak as she was, rocking her backwards and forwards in her arms.

Adela Bolton still stood by her, a light cloak thrown over her stage dress. It was she who had helped me to apply the ice to

the poor woman's aching head, and she who now understood the appealing look in her eyes.

"God bless you—you have been so good to me—you will see that she does not want," she murmured, when the delirium left her, and then she surrendered the little one, for her feeble flicker of returning intelligence as rapidly left her.

Adela answered nothing. But she nodded and pressed the hand which was hanging down, placing it quietly by her side. She still said nothing, as I caught up an old-fashioned, cracked looking-glass which was lying about among the rubbish, and held it to the pale lips, showing her that the mirror was not dimmed.

But she took the child in her arms, and went slowly out of the room. I thought that her heart was too full to let her speak. If the majority of men, in a dying world, cannot dwell long on such episodes, least of all can the members of the theatrical profession afford to dwell on them. It was but another death-bed scene where death-bed scenes are every-day experiences, to be wept over somewhat lavishly, and then put on one side. I have known a dying actor ironically playful on his own death-bed, mocking at himself and his own endurance, while all the time his spirit has been wild and weary.

The members of this company were like those of most others, loving each other none the less warmly for their continued sparring, and with a sort of unreality about the morbid intensity of their sensations. In most cases they were kind-hearted, but the stream of their warm, impulsive natures had been more or less defiled by flippant tastes and selfish habits. A corpse which did not come to life again was felt to be an incongruity, for to most of these unreasoning people, trained to butterfly habits, or to eat, drink, act, and sleep (the acting in the insignificant parts involving very little expenditure of thought), it seemed absurd to trouble about the fact that their own human lives would soon be ended, and they, like the rest, would return to dust. It was convenient to keep the reflection far off; and, therefore, I did not wonder first of all to hear that the funeral was to be hurried, and next that a benefit night was announced for Miss Bolton's last appearance, to be followed by a luxurious supper, to which, as a sign of attention, I was invited.

Jenny told me severely that she wondered a sensible family man, of my age and experience, should accept such a Bohemian invitation; but, as I was interested in my fellow-creatures, I determined to accept it. At the supper I heard various encomiums pronounced on Adela; and on the wonderful

presence of mind which had saved so many from a terrible fate.

"Very plucky of her," said a neighbour of mine, with a face that told of an unwholesome past, and whose whole appearance savoured of out-at-elbows stage-playerdom.

Another spoke more enthusiastically of the good fairy who had come to their assistance in the hour of their affliction, and a few were maundering and guttural as they raised the wine-cups to their lips, and drank again and again to the health of Adela Bolton. I saw an anxious look pass over her features before she responded to the noisy call that the heroine of the evening should return her thanks. I prided myself on being something of a physiognomist, and by this time I had become sufficiently acquainted with the changes in her mobile face to guess that she intended to make an appeal to the better feelings of her comrades. If a demon were to take possession of them, driving the better impulses out of them, and leaving only the malevolent or the fantastic, what hope would there be for the success of her request? And what demon is like alcohol? I felt as if I could almost hear the beating of her heart, as I saw her rise to her feet, drawing her slender, willowy frame to its full height, and looking at her associates with eyes which were a little too keen sometimes (as might have been expected from one who had to stand on her dignity so early in life), but which softened wonderfully when she gave way to her generous impulses.

"Thank you," she said simply, in that flute-like voice which so often thrilled upon her audience, and which, gentle as it was, proved to be so successful in making her hearers feel the tingling intensity of pain, or the joy which does good like a medicine. "I thank you for your kindness in thinking that you must give this sort of ovation to me. But I only did my duty—it is the good God we must really thank."

There was silence, and she took advantage of the pause to add:

"Friends, we will *do* something—that will be better than all the talk. I know your kind hearts, and I feel sure that you will all help me in making a little thank-offering to the good Providence over us, to which we owe our lives."

She was answered by a cheer, and then the door of the room slowly opened, and one of the assistants of the theatre entered, leading by the hand the little two-year-old orphan child.

I saw at once that this *tableau* had been arranged beforehand by the clever actress, who knew that, from long habit, her companions would relish the effect, or would count on some sort of

theatrical surprise as their due. She took the little one in her arms, and the child hid its face on her bosom and clung to her with a sob of fright. There were real tears in her brown eyes, and a little of the light of that divine love which is reflected in most mothers' faces, as she continued :

"I ask you to look upon this little one as mine. Never while I live shall it need protection. But because I have others already dependent upon me, and in case of my death, I ask you all to subscribe something, which together we will invest for its benefit."

The purses were out at once, nor was the subscription stinted. For as a rule these men and women were remarkable for the humanity of their disposition. And though many of them, if questioned on the matter, would have acknowledged that they considered the family institution to be a mistake, and the care of children humdrum, yet the conclusion was unanimous that, considering all the circumstances, it would have been a crying shame had the company allowed the pretty orphan to be taken to the workhouse.

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## II.

I SAW Adela Bolton once more before she left Blackquay, and then she was unusually grave. It was as if the light and the music which had first of all attracted me to her face gave less evident signs of their existence, because they had found a hiding-place in her heart. She assured me that she meant to have the little one christened—a duty which its own mother, Mrs. Stevenson, had neglected. She intended to call it "Maude;" and said that after a time she should send it to school, because she feared that her companions would look upon it as something which they could appropriate and spoil.

"And, doctor," she added gravely, "you must supply me with some handbook about the proper management of the health of children. I am fearfully ignorant, as I never had any little brothers or sisters. I was thinking last night of the number of little coffins that are carried to the grave betimes. Better, very likely, for the majority of them. They would have come to the bad if they had lived ; but I don't mean my little girl to go to the bad."

And then she looked at me with a not uncomic expression as she added :

"Not that I want her to be *dull*. I believe your pompous people go to the bad quite as much as those who laugh."

I heard afterwards that her grandmother was an Irishwoman, and I believe it was this Celtic cross in the stock, this caprice in the blood, that made her come out with flashes of humour, even when her voice was grave, and there was a sort of reticence in her eyes. A hearty voice, or kindly joke, always went far with her, but she was easily bored. Well, she went away from Blackquay on the next day, taking the child with her as she had intended, and I did not hear of her again for some years, with the exception of an occasional notice in the papers. I was not much astonished. For I knew that though she had considerable native talent, and had worked unremittingly at her task, the theatrical profession—like that of writers and painters—was a profession so arduous, that the slightest slackening in the race would allow an established favourite to be distanced by fresh competitors. I knew, in other words, how comparatively easy it may be to obtain a certain eminence, without reaching the narrow ranks of the first-rate, and I had never expected that Adela Bolton would give me another reading, say, of the character of Juliet or of Lady Macbeth.

I am afraid that the recollection of her had almost faded from my memory, when one evening, late in September, after the golden sunshine had died, and eight o'clock had struck from the old church tower, I was told that a stranger had come to see me, having travelled from some distance, to consult me on a matter of importance. I was prepared to hear that something serious had happened, as one of our raw, damp, gray mists had set in as soon as the sun had gone down—a mist which dripped from the garments of men and women, and gave a drenched, limp look in the twilight to the green leaves on the trees.

My visitor sat, regardless of his wet clothes. He had been inured, as I heard afterwards, to every vicissitude of climate. There was something odd about his appearance, and even his style of dress, which corresponded, as I recognised afterwards, with a character which was strangely commingled of weakness and strength.

He introduced himself as a retired naval officer, the brother of the poor woman, Mrs. Stevenson, who had expired on the night when there had been an alarm of fire at the theatre; but he wore a white tie, and looked as if he belonged to the clerical profession. The insolence of his egoism, and his conviction of his own importance as he commented most uncharitably on the circumstances of his sister's death, so completely took away my breath that I sat staring at him and not answering, as he further

professed his intention of instantly taking away his niece from "the Jezebel" to whose care she had been unfortunately confided.

"Arrogant nonsense," I began to mutter between my set teeth, having half a mind to tell him at once that he was a "maundering hypocrite."

I had always rather prided myself on my Abernethyan outspokenness; but fortunately, before I denounced him, I was struck by a peculiar sadness and an unusual look of intensity beneath the sunburn in his face. Angry as I was for Adela's sake, I could not help seeing that the man was in earnest, that he lived in a high key, and that the anxious thoughts which he expressed were legible in his face.

"An intolerable dogmatist, with something die-away about him approaching to spiritual foppery," I said, still trying him in my private thoughts, but deciding that he was no hypocrite.

"That's an astounding theory of yours," I remarked coldly, speaking aloud.

"What theory?"

"Why, that a woman, because she is an actress, is not to be trusted with the care of a child."

It was his turn to stare with a look of consternation. Apparently it had not occurred to him that my view of the matter would not correspond with his own.

"I think it my duty as a professional man," I continued, speaking slowly, "to hate and fight against every form of physical disease, and apparently you think it *your* duty to fight against spiritual evils. So far, so good. But this woman happens to be a noble one, with a wholesome mind, clean as spring water."

He muttered something about being mixed up with the "worst form of worldly amusement."

I wondered whether it would be of any use to represent to him that the world of St. Paul's time was a somewhat different world from that of Queen Victoria. But I saw that he had fixed ideas like "Archimedes' fulcrum;" and after all it is a good thing to get hold of fixed ideas, if you want to do anything towards moving the universe.

"You may safely trust your niece with Miss Bolton," I repeated confidently. "That is my opinion, but, if you don't like to take it, I advise you to go and see the lady yourself."

The upshot of the matter was that, as I was going to London to see a patient before the end of the week, Captain Denton decided to accompany me, and we both of us called together at one of the little villas which had risen up like mushrooms in a comparatively new region called "Maida Vale."

In the interim I had begun to respect my new acquaintance, though I could not say I liked him. If he was hard to others, he was equally hard to himself: a macerated, fanaticised sort of a fellow, whom we doctors connect with that mortification of the flesh which leads in the next generation to strumousness and hysteria. I felt as if it was my duty to be angry with him. And yet there was a fulness and completeness about his religious belief which one rarely meets with in the present day. Every object round him and every deed of his life seemed to him—as to St. Augustine—to have some spiritual import.

I remembered Adela Bolton's healthy liking for mirth—a mirth which would have driven away this fellow's austere and yellow melancholy. And I wondered if they would not pull the child to pieces between them. The house was ordinary enough, but the little sitting-room into which we were shown was a revelation, with its birds, its musical instruments, its tastefully-selected paintings, and, above all, its wild flowers, arranged in preference to hot-house favourites.

I remarked on the fact that most men could do little towards improving the sameness of domestic architecture, but that the touches of the women were seen in the interior; the imagination could accomplish so much more than the utmost wealth and skill.

"Now this room represents the owner, as the nest fits the bird. Most of our arts are suffering from over-civilisation. I dread a monotonous dead level in poetry and painting, but here is a little bit of original thought."

I am afraid I spoke from sheer perversity, knowing the puritanical horror with which my companion would view the looking-glasses (which were not *then* decried by fashion), the photographs of the actress in various costumes which were placed about the rooms, and the various little adornments which suggested the tricks of the stage. A groan had almost burst from him when the door opened, and he retreated a few steps as if to protect himself from mischief incarnate. I think he was hardly prepared for such a distinguished-looking woman, mellowed and improved by years, who advanced to us with hands outstretched.

"Ah, my little Maude will be so glad to see her uncle, but what can I do? She is at school—a day-school—she will be home in the evening, but you should have let me know you were coming."

This to Captain Denton; then she grasped both my hands with a suspicion of moisture in her bright eyes.

"Doctor, your kind face is like a whiff of the sea air. The world has not gone so kindly with me since we parted."

She still spoke with that intonation which I had always so much admired, acquired, no doubt, from long practice in the art of clear enunciation. Her musical voice lingered a little on the full-bodied vowels, as she distinctly pronounced the consonants. The next minute I was aware, without being told, that her sensitiveness had received a shock. She was feeling like one who had gushed without reason. The flush died out of her face, her eyes dilated a little as she looked at Captain Denton. And then her sense of humour came to her assistance. I knew she could no more control it than the physical tickling which causes sneezing. The laughter in such a case is a sort of reflex action, an instinctive effort to relieve tension like the sigh by which the lungs are eased.

"Ah, I see," she said. And then she laughed till I found the laughter so infectious that, in spite of myself, I joined in it.

It was about the worst thing we could have done with this man so fastidious, so inexorable, on whom it was necessary she should make a good impression, if she did not wish to be deprived of the child.

I saw at once that he would think he had to do with a "loose" woman. But that sort of perversity for which I have often reproached myself, and which I believe to be one of the most fatal laws of human nature, urging one to be silly and to inflict injury on oneself, seemed to have come upon her in full force, and to prevent her from displaying herself to advantage before Captain Denton.

In the conversation which followed she persistently turned off everything which I tried to tell to her advantage. She had succeeded in conquering her laughter, but she erred now in the opposite direction. Her face did not move a muscle, only the nostrils quivered when he uttered some sentiment which took her by surprise. Once, when he turned to scrutinise her features, she winced a little, and said :

"Oh, Dr. Meredith is so indulgent, he has always a good word for every one ; but—you—you will never be a courtier."

"You are right, if you think I would never flatter my dearest friend," he answered, still looking at her as if she were —as she was, in very truth—a new experience in his world. "I should think you get plenty of that sort of poison."

"Enough to suck me in and swallow me up in a sort of poisonous whirlpool, with unfathomable depths ; oh, I know what you mean, though you don't express it."

"If you express my thought for me, you can't accuse me of rudeness."

"Well hit! That is one for you," she answered, trying to take it in good part, and with that comradeship to which her habits had accustomed her.

I felt for her as I saw the astonishment in the man's face, and heard him begin to explain, laboriously but less clumsily than I had expected, that, though he had no right to express an opinion about herself, yet so far as his little niece was concerned he had equally no right to shift his responsibilities on others.

Then the keen light which seemed to be suddenly shot through the blue depths of her eyes told me how his words had suddenly smitten her to the heart.

"You were long enough in remembering your little niece."

"Letters crossed—no one wrote to me—nor did I see any entry in the papers of my sister's death. I was detained long abroad. But as soon as I returned I made inquiries. I intend no offence."

"Offence, do you call it? When you come here, and deliberately put a knife in me?"

She sank into a chair, and covered her face with her hands.

He looked vexed, but did not retract. I never saw a man more incapable of tact in my life, and, though my own veins tingled with the sense of his being grossly rude, I could do nothing to help.

I saw her again the next morning, when I could speak to her by herself. She received me with apparent composure, but I knew that the insult rankled in her mind.

"It will be no use to go against him, if he claims the child. He has the law on his side. Besides, you know, I have nothing to leave her. I could not stand in her way, as he will provide for her well. And it would be harder for me to part with her when she is grown up, and for her to hear me spoken against *then*."

"How do you mean—spoken against?" I asked, with an uncomfortable sense of how impossible it would be to get these two people to understand each other—the one with that heavy, unsympathetic spirit which clogs too much of our literature; the other with light heart, and sensitive feelings easily touched.

"Ah, don't I know as well as if I heard it?" she answered, with a quick warmth of anger blazing up in her dark blue eyes and a glowing indignation in her face. "The very fact that a

woman has had to fight with the world unaided, and has had things said about her—that is enough! Cæsar's wife, you know! And then, if any little society journal attacks us, and goodness knows the lies they tell—there is said to be always some truth at the bottom of those things—I have long given up thinking that I can do any good by knocking my head continually against stone walls. What is the good of one's impotent indignation at the wrongs one can't help?"

I had nothing to answer, for I could see that Captain Denton had a will hammered out of iron, and he seemed to me to be wanting in all keenness of perception. Even Adela's attendance at church seemed to him to be a mere concession to public opinion. I was present when the child was handed to him the next morning, for Adela reasoned, with her usual prompt good sense, that if the blow was to come upon her at all, she would rather have it sharp and short.

"It is a pity that I should ruin her any further with my fatal affection, and a worse pity that she should hanker—poor little one—after forbidden fruit," she said, with a bitterness which proved to me how Captain Denton's hardness was already beginning to act like corrosive acid on her nature.

I would rather not remember the little girl's sobs and tears, nor how she clung in a terrified way to her foster-mother at the parting. What a delicate, frail-looking thing she was, with large gray, sensitive eyes—occupying so large a portion of her thin little face that Adela's friends had nicknamed her "All-eyes." I wondered if by any mental process the swamp could be drawn off this "sour-complexioned" man's mind, or if he was falling back on a sense of duty when he separated these two who loved each other so. Once or twice I noticed an unusual expression on his face as he kept his eyes on Adela, who quieted the child, and manifested throughout that air of resolution which she had shown years before when she confronted the fire. Once also he started. It was when she said to him apropos of a wish that little Maude should have childish tales—tales of Jack and the Bean-stalk, Mother Hubbard, and Cock Robin; or, at any rate, fables of the exploits of birdie and fish, illustrated by such artists as Harrison Weir:

"You know Swedenborg's idea, that the children in heaven are educated by angels, and that the angels treat them like children, not forcing them into anything like premature development."

I thought he uttered an exclamation of surprise, and for the first time he had a look of lucid comprehension in his face. He remained, however, master of the situation, and she told

me afterwards that he only irritated her by staring at her, and she wished to wipe off the recollection of the degradation.

After all, the man thought he was doing his duty, and I knew that I could trust Adela Bolton to pass well through the ordeal without letting her warm heart or her sharp wits mislead her.

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## III.

I WAS a good deal surprised when I heard again from her in November. Would I come again to London on any day when I could manage to come? The question of fees was not to stand in the way, as I must remember that she was saved the expense of the child. Her mother was more ill than usual, and she was lonely and out of sorts.

I had never before heard that she had a mother. That she had some mysterious expense never discussed in public, some relative to support, had hitherto been an inference rather than a certainty, for the subject was tabooed.

I saw at once that Adela was altered when she met me at the station, and drove home with me to her lodgings, though the alteration was not likely to be generally noticed. There was a strained look in her countenance, and directly she began to talk I saw that she was not in good vein. Once or twice she tried to make a feeble joke, but all such too evident attempts at making merry when the heart is sad leave the wits jaded with the effort, and defeat their own purpose.

"How is little Maude getting on?"

"Oh, I pity the child," she said quickly, and her voice had a sort of sharpness, as if to keep the emotion out of it, "but it will never do to show I pity her. She has written to me once or twice complaining. But she will no doubt learn to adapt herself by degrees to the governess institution sort of world—apportioning its exact proportion of praise or blame to every tiny duty or omission—in which Captain Denton lives. He will succeed in extinguishing her natural tastes. I have to thank him for one thing. He has not prejudiced her against me; he has not as yet ventured to make any sort of base insinuation."

It was the way in which she blurted out the word "insinuation," rather than the word itself, which convinced me how much she suffered. Such displays of emotion were so rare

with one usually calm and self-possessed, that I knew how deeply she had been wounded. We drove on in silence till we reached the house, and she, drawing away the rich curtains which divided her little drawing-room from the adjacent bedroom, said as suddenly :

"Doctor Meredith, I dare say you, as well as Captain Denton, have thought that I was one of those butterfly creatures who enjoyed my life just because of my high spirits, never wanting to question what the universe was for, or any of the mysteries in it. The world has so judged me, and you are the first man," she added, with a little break in her voice, "whom I have admitted into my blue chamber ; but you—you are kind, and used to feeling—the throbbing pulses—of—this —suffering world."

If she spoke a little melodramatically, in spite of those breaks in her voice, it was her ordinary way—second nature—and, therefore, not consciously artificial. And, as I stood on the threshold of the room, my heart bled for her. For on the sofa lay an emaciated, paralysed old woman, beautiful to look upon as a senseless waxen figure, even in her evident idiotcy, with arching black brows, plentiful white hair, clear skin, and a mouth which smiled one unvarying and childish, contented smile. She looked at me, but seemed to take no notice of my presence, or of anything else in the room, which loving and skilful hands had decorated most lavishly for her amusement.

"That is my mother," said Adela, in answer to my questioning eyes. "She had fit after fit before she lapsed into this condition. It was years and years ago, when I was quite a young girl, and the fits came on after a great mental shock. They told me she would never be any better, and they wanted to shut her up, but I have kept her here, amused her, and tended her for years. I have had the best advice, but it was all of no good. She neither cares for me nor knows me. I am desperately alone."

I then knew for the first time how it was that she had never married, and had never had any one to protect her from the viper tongues of malice and jealousy. All her spare time and all her earnings had been given to her mother. This explanation of the enigma I never should have guessed. Even now, when I knew it, my heart grew hot within me at the recollection of the scandal from which she had suffered, though I knew I was a little illogical in my wrath, since no one in her position could expect full immunity from gossip. Yet scandal which trifles with a woman's good name is a worse agent of destruction than vitriol or nitro-glycerine.

"And this sort of loneliness must have been peculiarly trying to the nerves," I said to myself, as I looked more closely at the invalid. "A companion and yet not a companion, a sort of death in life, all the more terrible from its similarity to the real thing—a voice not raised above a whisper, yet a sort of echo of Adela's own—a childhood of dull monotony, without the teeming brain or even the warm affection of childhood."

"You must have needed all your cheerfulness, but it will not last long—the morning's awakening will come soon, and then she will know all you have done for her—your filial devotion, your unselfishness."

"I have done nothing but what it was natural to do—it was my form of selfishness."

"That does not matter."

"Not matter?"

"Not very much, I think. You would not pull a flower to pieces to examine its roots. Never accuse yourself of selfishness, if the blossom is sweet."

It was in vain I tried to reason with her. In the gesture of self-depreciation, which rejected all the ordinary formulæ of comfort, and in the morbid state which was so new to her, I detected the result of Captain Denton's behaviour, and felt my gorge rise with indignation at him.

"Better to have been undeceived than to have gone on living in a fool's paradise," she said despondingly, when I hinted at my wrath.

"Pooh!" I answered, "undeceived by a fellow who spins for ever on the same wheel, the same pivot of thought!"

She continued as if she did not hear me.

"I had no choice; I was brought up to it from the cradle. I was but a little child when I learnt the grammar of my art. People don't understand *that*—a girl has to go through years of drudgery to get a proper salary at all. Do you think they take half-educated actresses, and pay them? It would be fifty times better for them not to be taken. And then, when my mother was sick—from an accident in a transformation scene—she fell—it was a terrible distance—ah! it is not all amusing in our profession—when she was sick and helpless—and I had to support her, could I give up what I already knew—all because—because—I was misunderstood?"

It was useless for me to tell her she need not argue with me. There was something at the bottom of her new restlessness, and her morbid dissatisfaction with herself, which till now had been so foreign to her open-hearted character. I tried to attribute it to the terrible misconstruction of her motives, and to a delicate

sensitive nature which could not bear up under a sense of shame.

She had complained of her loneliness, and when her mother was gone, she told me that she had the feeling of walking in a chilly valley all alone, with the sun shining on the tops of the hills round her, but not on *her*. I tried to make her understand that she was simply making that discovery which all human beings make sooner or later, that the state of the soul is often bound up with that of the body, and that her soul was suffering in sympathy with an overworked frame.

"Come and stay with us at Halstead," I said. "My wife will be so glad to have you."

The two women sufficiently resembled each other to make me hope that Adela would confide in Jenny.

But though she raised no objection to coming to stay with us, as soon as she could make the necessary arrangements, she said nothing about herself; she confided in no one. I need not say that my wife devoted herself to her, and did all in her power to restore her to a healthy condition. But, though I had hoped that time and patient treatment might effect a cure, the weeks passed on till the holiday was nearly at an end, and I could not conceal from myself that there was little or no improvement.

If there was one thing that I was unforgiving about, it was the man whose judgment of her had gone like a stroke of lightning to her heart. I wished to hear nothing more of this man. I declared that, if I stood face to face with him, I would reproach him with his ingratitude, and that if duelling were not out of fashion in this country, I might—perhaps—have felt that it must be rid of one or other of us. I know not by what perversity of fate it happened that, before Adela left Halstead, I had a hasty summons from Captain Denton. The wretch, as I said to Jenny, who advised me to moderate my language, had trampled on Adela's heart, and yet he thought so little of the abominable nature of his conduct as to write and consult me now that he was in a difficulty.

The child had scarlet fever. He was greatly in need of help. I had half a mind to refuse to go to him, when, to my astonishment, Adela, who was usually so quiescent, began to assert all her former energetic influence. And as if to confirm a suspicion which had once or twice occurred to me, but which I had dismissed as impossible, that in the background or inner structure of her mind was not only the child, but the man who had tyrannised over her, she said:

"You must go at once, and you must take *me*."

We tried to remonstrate, but she only shook her head.

"I can't help it, if they put a false construction on what I do; they have put it already; they always insinuated things, and I used to say that I wished they would say them right out. I assure you that what I do now can make no difference in that way. Maude is ill—let me go."

It was useless to contradict her. She had again to face a danger and grapple with an emergency, and I smiled to see again the old light in her face. The difficulty of the journey was nothing to her, though we had to put up with some inconveniences, and travelled rapidly by night.

I remember wondering on the way whether it had fared with Captain Denton as with Adela, and whether, in trying to speak to the innocent child and finding it necessary to teach her, he too had not been startled by the revelation of a new tenderness hitherto concealed in his own nature. Certain it was that the letter by which he summoned me showed anxiety of a kind which I should not have expected him to show.

I had no need to apologise for bringing Miss Bolton; for, though he was certainly startled at seeing her, a sort of moisture came into his eyes, and he thanked her for her goodness in coming with an earnestness in his voice of which he became quickly ashamed, when he saw that I was watching.

Adela did not lift her veil. She simply asked to be taken at once to the sick-room. It was a huge, featureless room, with blank walls and no pictures on them; it made one shrug one's shoulders to think of the little one who was being nursed in it. It was evident that Adela never doubted for an instant that her darling would love her and believe in her still with the unshaken faith of little children. The fever was over, as we had been told, but Maude did not get better. She seemed to pine away, and was gradually losing strength. The doctor who had already been attending the case by no means objected to Miss Bolton as a nurse.

"It might rouse her," he said a little hopelessly. "At any rate, the experiment could be tried."

We motioned to Oliver Denton to keep back as we approached the bedside, treading gingerly.

The child's face had a white, odd look, and her little frame was somewhat emaciated, but she breathed a sigh of full content, and tears of joy stole into her pretty eyes, as Adela gently removed her bonnet and sat down quietly by her side.

"Mother!" she said, beneath her breath.

What could Adela answer but the soothing words, so often meaningless, uttered in such cases?

"Yes, my darling, mother has come back. She will take

care of you till you are well again, only you must not talk. Lie quiet just now."

The tiny fingers instinctively slipped into the larger hand. The little girl was not demonstrative. She was always slow to exhibit the signs of affection which were really deeper in her than other children. She had only passed for a child of ordinary parts, but the man who stood watching at the door with that curious and indescribable look in his face, must have felt a vivid sense of his criminality, if he remembered the delirious ravings during which she had so constantly called on her adopted mother. It was evident even now that he dared not approach the bed, or make any exhibition of his sympathy and regret.

"I was obliged to tell him that the reason the fever went so hard with her was because she had fretted quietly," said Mr. Holland, when we were alone together; "it is always such an unnatural thing for a child to have to suppress grief."

The suspense of the next few hours was horrible. The child's life hung by a thread, and the hardness of wrenching a great hope out of a good and unselfish heart had never been more terrible to me than when, later in the evening, Adela followed us to the door of the bedroom.

"Is there nothing to be done?" she asked, leaving the trained nurse for a minute or two alone, and closing the door gently behind her, as she turned to Mr. Holland first in her bewilderment.

"Am I God, to kill or make alive?" cried the poor surgeon, shrugging his shoulders as he looked at me. "You must keep —ah!—to our directions—you know—the wine and nourishment given regularly if possible."

The "if possible" was sadly needed. Then I felt her hand on my coat-sleeve.

"Dr. Meredith, I know you feel for my trouble, can't you keep her alive? If we could tide over this crisis—she is sinking—she can scarcely swallow—it is useless to give her the stimulants."

I was silent, and she continued:

"Oh, if I could only put myself in her place—such a blight has fallen on my own life, and I have no one to live for. If I could only do *something* to quicken her sluggish blood, and communicate to her a little of my useless strength. Dr. Meredith, don't be angry with me—but there *is* an operation —open a vein in my arm—you don't know how strong I am."

I could only shake my head. And then she suddenly gave way, falling back against the door, clenching her hands in her agony, and twining them in her hair in the efforts which she was making to control herself and master her pain.

It was Denton who came to her assistance, as he heard the low sound of her weeping.

The man seemed to be desperate ; he said, to her astonishment, though the rare moisture which I had noticed before stood again in his eyes :

"Don't give way, go back to her and cheer her. Try her with one of your old merry talks."

"Right!" I said, taking the cue, "we doctors are obliged to have a cheerful look, and even a hearty joke, as part of our stock-in-trade in a sick-room. And in the case of a child like this where the quicksilver nature rises and falls almost as rapidly as the temperature——"

She did not wait for me to finish my sentence. She had flown back like a bird, and when I saw her a short time afterwards the furrows were smoothed from her brow. She was arranging the pillows with a dexterous light-handedness which seldom comes without long practice, and a smile beamed from her face, such as I had not seen on it since the old glad days. Her hands were strong, though tremulous, but her lips did not tremble at all. How she could force that smile when her heart was aching with such anxiety was a miracle to me! But there is no fathoming women.

It was equally incomprehensible how she could let the Captain nod encouragingly to her from the door, and only beat a quick retreat at the sound of a low, rippling laugh—the very laugh which he had taken umbrage at when he met her months before.

"If I stay any longer I shall make a fool of myself," was the only explanation he vouchsafed as he nearly knocked me over on the staircase.

He did not appear again till all of us were marvelling at the success of the experiment, and also at the revelation of such depths of tender affection with such unexpected self-command.

The little one had no longer refused her beef-tea. A slight abscess, which had alarmed us, succeeding the ordinary sore throat, for which we had feared to try an operation as the strength was so much reduced, had burst when little Maude tried to join in Adela's infectious laugh. The difficulty of swallowing once obviated, the progress made by the little patient became steady.

Talk about laughter! I never heard such laughing as went on in that solemn, red-brick house when Maude was becoming what the trained nurse called "convolvulus." We dismissed that nurse, by-the-bye, as soon as she was really convalescent. And one day I found the two grown-up people—Adela and Captain Denton—playing at dolls with the child.

"I assure you I don't think the worse of you," I answered, laughing in my turn, when the latter attempted some sort of lame explanation.

It was all very well so long as the fascination of this state of things continued.

But one day when the Captain, taking advantage of this sort of play, held one of Adela's hands till his grasp hurt her, and attempted to take her, as she said, "in his leading-strings," she refused the offer quietly, almost with terror.

"Nobody can oblige me to say 'Yes,'" she explained, "and it will be better for me to go away again than let him become my tyrant."

She was one of those few women whom love does not blind, and there was nothing in her nature which tended to keep up delusive fancies. Yet though she added, "He has never trusted me, and there cannot be happiness without perfect trust. He looks upon me as if I were a monster of depravity," I know from the something unexpressed—too subtle for words, which passed from eye to eye—that she had read the bitter pain which had cut down to the very soul of the man who had once combined so much austerity with his enthusiasm, and would do all in her power to spare him mortification.

"Come," I said, "it is not like you to bring up old grudges. Most of our brains are too stupid and our hearts too shallow to judge of both sides of the question at once, but we cannot do more than remedy our mistakes."

After all these two people had more in common than they knew. Neither of them would let sluggishness predominate over zeal, or languor over passion. Both were stirred by those immense considerations which had made Denton seem hard; both had been saddened in their early lives, and for both there remained an *aftermath* fresh and bright.

# STRUCK DUMB

## I.

SHE was a favourite in the village; no one could help liking her. She had her proud and petulant moods, but then they were so quickly over. It was impossible to fall out with her for any length of time together; she would disarm you with her affection, her readiness to make amends. I believed that no one could quarrel with her for more than ten minutes at the outside; and I ought to have known. I had watched her on every possible opportunity, in storm and sunshine, sickness and health, from her first entrance on the stage of this life; and, as I sometimes said to Jenny, I believed that on all the earth there was not a sweeter or more engaging little lass.

Well, as to sickness, she had measles and whooping-cough, but threw off these childish complaints quickly enough, and I think it was her buoyant health which was one of the greatest charms about her.

It did one good to meet the child. She seemed to brighten the sombre stretch of those somewhat melancholy moors. I scarcely ever remember to have seen her walk. She was always skipping or running, as if there were springs instead of weights in her feet. Joyce was her name, and, thinking of Blake's poem, we had nicknamed her "Joy."

I remember how Mrs. Milner smiled when I suggested that name, and how her lips quivered a little as she bowed her head in thankfulness, accepting that present of "Joy." For she was a widow, and had taken refuge in our little hamlet, where the healthful climate proved the best panacea for her somewhat shattered constitution. But she was not a woman to make the

worst of her troubles, and I remember how she told me, as she looked at her infant, that the merciful Father had sent it, and the name with which I had christened it must have been an inspiration.

"Obvious enough," I answered, laughing; "any blockhead might have suggested it."

"Yes; but, till *you* mentioned it, I was afraid that to adopt it might seem like forgetting—they do not understand me here—I never forget; *he* has already entered into joy, and do you think he would like to see us gloomy?"

I noticed that after that the ugly widow's caps, which had hidden Mrs. Milner's bright hair, and the hateful, heathenish crape, were abandoned by degrees.

Whenever there was an excuse for it, little Joy was dressed in white, and a bunch of wild flowers was usually pinned on her frock. I came to look out for her as naturally as I looked for the birds, or for the furze and occasional patches of heather on the open, breezy moor, which had succeeded the one-time gigantic forest that had probably flourished where now we were supplied with the rich peat soil. In my lonely walks to visit patients in the outlying farm-houses, I constantly met the child and her mother, the former always beautifully dressed.

People who were sharp with their tongues began to comment, as the girl grew up, on the black beaver hats, the fur-lined cloaks, and neat-fitting gloves with innumerable buttons, with which Mrs. Milner always managed to supply her daughter.

Miss Delmott, the gossip and cynic of the village, remarked, with a disapproving shake of her scanty locks, that "folks who *would* wear fine gloves, though they couldn't rightly afford to buy them, must expect a constantly recurring struggle," and I am not quite sure that my Jenny did not for once agree with the gossip. For the best of wives being but human, and jealousy the shadow cast by love, I found it wiser to restrict my praises to the girl, without turning myself into a partisan of the gracious, middle-aged woman. Not that Mrs. Milner made any artificial pretence to be younger than she really was. Yet in her life of innocence and retirement she had retained her pleasing appearance, and was remarkably well preserved.

Never did I see a more ardent tie of affection than that between this mother and child as the latter grew up. The softening look which came into Joy's face at the very sight of her mother, and the glances of trust and confiding sympathy which were continually exchanged between the two, made

me sometimes regret, for Jenny's sake, that our own two children were sons. For a daughter is in one sense the closest and most sympathetic companion a woman can have, and in this case it was not possible for the two to keep anything from each other. I have seen a flush spring up in both cheeks at the same moment, and both pair of eyes flash as if they had caught fire from each other at the mention of the same thought, so close was their affinity.

It was, therefore, with some surprise that, when the girl was fully fledged and beyond the stage of copy-books and sweets, I heard that her mother intended to send her for a year or two to a school abroad.

It would have been beyond my province to remonstrate, except on the score of health, but I immediately recalled all the most dismal stories I could recollect of diseases contracted at French or Swiss schools.

"She will be underfed. *Choux* cooked up in various forms will be given to her day after day. A maximum of chopped-up cabbage stalks with a minimum of meat. Girls who are underfed go into consumption and contract spinal complaints."

"Oh, don't be afraid; she is very strong! Don't you suppose I had inquired into all that? She *must* have the same advantages in her education as others," answered Mrs. Milner, ignoring the surliness of my prophecies.

And I then understood how the widow had sacrificed herself—how in her inexpressible pride and delight in the one being whom she loved most on earth, and who loved her back with the same tender affection, she was ready as usual to deny herself, even in the indulgence of her own affections, that Joyce should have everything.

The time seemed long to all of us till the girl returned to Halstead, more unspoilt than I had expected, and apparently as inoffensive and merry as ever; but changed in many respects, some people would have said, for the better.

It took me a little time, even with Jenny's help, to decide wherein the difference lay. And my wife prided herself on her intuition. My own dread had been that the routine of a fashionable school would have destroyed the girl's individuality, changing her into one of those aimless and colourless machines—with legs which walk not, and brains which think not—that Nature in the other sex seems to turn out by the dozen.

But my power of forecasting a future had in this case forsaken me. Joyce was as spontaneous as ever; her great tender-

ness for her mother had never decreased, but she had become more than ever a creature of moods, keeping one's observation always on the stretch. And she was restless. A Peri at the gate of Paradise could not have listened more eagerly for sights and sounds of the outer world than she did. Oh, how she longed after wealth and society, with the power to go everywhere and do everything that she liked! And the secret of it was that she had discovered her own fascination. I knew it the first time I saw her in company, when the young men seemed to be naturally drawn to her, and when she tried her sarcasm on them, laughed at them or made fools of them by turns; and when I had to look at her again to make sure whether the words which seemed so heedless were really the outcome of childlike guilelessness or not. I knew, to my vexation, that the girl was playing with edged tools. She was a flirt of the deepest dye, and I had always had a horror of flirts. They seemed to me like children playing with fire, singeing their own fingers and crying out at the pain, but caring nothing for a whole conflagration of their fellow-creatures.

Perhaps Joy could not help it. She was one of those women who seem to be born to be queens. And yet, whenever I saw her surrounded at one of our country parties by a lot of young fellows, who seemed to be elated and dejected by turns, I could not help anathematising that abominable French schoolmistress. I had no doubt it was Madame who, by trying to impart to the girl a pretty, demure, and yet finished style, with an affectation of not knowing that she was flattered and courted, had made her puzzling and bewildering to a maddening degree. For the original disposition had been simply overlaid with a thin coating of veneer, which gave to the occasional vehemence of her natural modes of speech all the piquancy of contrast, and made her irresistible.

So, in common with many others, thought the son of a neighbouring squire, a young Antinous in his own way, rich, and tolerably clever as well as handsome. I had known him also from his boyhood, and had reason to think highly of him. Nothing better, it seemed to us, could happen than that a match should take place between the two.

I did not often go to parties, but I happened to be at the afternoon gathering at which Paul Markby first met her. We called them croquet parties, not garden parties, in those days. Croquet was a becoming game, less heating and fatiguing than the more energetic lawn-tennis. It was a game which offered opportunities for flirtation. It was possible to make it abound

in pretty situations. I think I hear again the rattling of the balls through the hoops, and the exclamations of the ringing voices in the fresh air. I remember it was autumn, and I could hear the patter of horse-chestnuts, as the ripe fruit burst from their white-lined sheaths and fell on the gravel of the garden.

The air was beginning to be a little sharp, but Joy was still dressed in the white material which her mother chose for her. She wore it of some texture which was a little thicker for the season, and she looked, as some one said, like a white amaryllis in it. It was one of the accusations which women made against her that she dressed herself artistically and fantastically, as if she took upon herself, chit as she was, to "set" the fashions. Those were days when girls had no option in such things, and could not dress themselves as they do now, *à la* Kate Greenaway, or after Owen Jones, or Dante Rossetti. I am afraid it was partly my fault if Joy was peculiar. I had taught her to hate crinolines, and avoid a pinched waist.

I think I see her now as she was that afternoon, with the woollen material falling in graceful folds about her slender and beautifully-proportioned figure, crowned with her light hair, in the varying shades of which the sun played, bringing out meshes of gold. The masses which remained in shadow were of a deep, rich brown, matching the colour of the eyes, and of the lashes which touched the smooth young cheeks when the eyes were lowered The mouth, with its delicate outline, had something mocking and playful in it, which seemed to be out of keeping with the meditative eyes, and it was these contrasts which were surprising in her, and made one want to look at her again.

Young Markby kept looking at her, as he might have looked at some apparition. He had prided himself on being very fastidious about women, and told me afterwards that he never remembered before to have seen any girl with whom he had been quite pleased. I noticed that he looked at Joy as if he did not quite understand her, and as if it were a new experience to have something which he could not quite fathom, and which produced the sensation of wonder as he watched. That she was aware she had a new idolater I could tell by the kindling eye with which she just glanced at him beneath the brown lashes, and the colour which was heightened on her vermeil cheek. I might have known it also by the rather teasing smile she was accustomed to bestow on the unfortunate moths which fluttered in brief madness to scorch themselves at her candle.

This was the beginning of it. But it soon became more

earnest. Joy was falling into the snare. She was so accustomed to go trippingly on her way, while she dug a pit for others, that I could not help smiling at the half-unconscious, anxious striving against a strange sensation, which betrayed itself in her indignant disclaimer to my wife.

"She tells me that she looks upon husbands as inevitable inflictions, and means to put off the evil day as long as it is possible," said Jenny, to whom I had confided my expectations.

"Oh, never you listen to her. She is caught in her own toils. Such talk may suit Miss Farley, who speaks on platforms about politics, but Joy is not at all a representative woman."

"Well, it strikes me she is putting on her undemonstrative manner; you know the power she has of repelling all advances."

"Not in *this* case," I answered, rubbing my hands. "That is just a little protest before she hoists the white flag. The citadel will surrender, you take my word for it."

And so after a little while it did. It was as if Paul Markby had taken it by storm. All her coyness and her little petulant airs could avail her nothing.

"Only wait, she will be yours in time," I had said encouragingly to the young fellow, with words that dissipated his dejection. I had no clue to the changed current of her thoughts, and yet I had guessed rightly, and the Halstead people rejoiced.

For a little while it was a pleasure to see Paul Markby. Joyce, girl-like, and still not devoid of a spice of coquetry, took her congratulations calmly. But Paul went about as if the glow of his heart could be seen through his waistcoat, to borrow a simile from Heine.

It was partly Mrs. Milner's fault that the marriage was to be delayed for a year.

"Courting-time, when all the world is young," as she said, in plain, old-fashioned English, "did not come more than once in a lifetime, and it was a pity for young people to bring the cares of married life upon themselves too early."

With that gentle, unselfish way of ignoring herself whenever the happiness of her child was concerned, she spent a great part of that winter and all the next spring and summer in arranging happy meetings for the lovers. It was an unusually genial spring. Flowers were warmed into early bloom by the unwonted mildness of the air. Early in April the bluebells and anemones were tempting intruders into mossy thickets and bosky woods; the peach, the cherry, and the pear were all in their short-lived bridal white a week or ten days before the usual date; the blackened twigs of the hedges were leafing

apace, and the catkins of the oak, the willow, the hazel, and the birch were tasselling the nakedness of the branches, harbingers of the wealth of green which would soon be revealed. At such a time, when the blackbirds, the finches, and the larks were making every spot musical with their songs, everything went pretty smoothly and merrily for those who were too young and happy to dream of possible calamity.

She was a sad coquette,
He was her lover true.

That ditty had not then become hackneyed in drawing-rooms; but I felt inclined to whistle something of the sort to myself, when I met the two wandering about with companions, or alone together, and saw that even *then* there would be sometimes an occasional hitch. For Paul was too madly in love to be unsusceptible of the passion of jealousy, and the jesting mood with which Joy treated his somewhat *exigeant* passion was a little irritating and perplexing at times.

The first hitch was at a ball which took place about Easter, at the neighbouring town—Blackquay—at which there was to be an unusual gathering of the Halstead and Blackquay people. Joyce looked beautiful that night, with a colour on her satin cheeks which could scarcely have been matched by the most delicate roses; wild bunches of lily of the valley were skilfully combined with the billowy, diaphanous drapery which was then in fashion. I knew at once that was her mother's taste. I also saw that she was arrayed for conquest, and my heart misgave me as I looked at Paul Markby and guessed how the flutter of his heart would answer to the slightest rustle of that drapery. Would he guess that her proximity might prove too fascinating for some of the other young fellows who might not have heard of their engagement? Her vivacity was greater than usual; she was always more charming when she was a little excited.

Low dresses were worn at this time. I cannot say I ever quite liked the style, especially when it was adopted by women who were faded and wrinkled. But, if it suited any one, it suited Joy. I remember how the ivory whiteness of her shoulders contrasted to advantage with the shoulder-blades of others who were too thin to go uncovered, and whose friends should have induced them to wear high dresses; or with other shoulders which were powdered with some abominable stuff which I was afterwards told was called "blanc de perles."

We doctors never admire anything that is not natural and healthy; and, while I was lamenting that some of the sickly-looking girls whose bones were not properly covered would be

exposing themselves unnecessarily to the chances of pneumonia or phthisis, I equally deplored that which was ghastly and artificial.

We did not often have such fine doings. We elder ones resorted to cards in one room of the building which some enterprising shareholders had lately run up at Blackquay, and which served the double purpose of a town-hall and a sort of *Conversationhaus*, as the Germans would have called it; while in an adjacent apartment of large dimensions the young people were waltzing in a smooth, cadenced, regular manner, with sleepy-looking chaperons ranged on benches round the wall.

It seemed to me that these young people never knew when to leave off, and as if—like all the young people of the present day—they would be inclined to go on with the exercise for ever. Once or twice I left the card-table to take a peep at the happy, confident girls and the young men, who were dancing with that expression of gravity on their faces and anxious desire to get through the thing with some measure of success which is characteristic of nearly all young Englishmen who waltz.

"I suppose we were once as great fools as these boys," said an old cynic who stood near me at the doorway which connected the two rooms.

"I wish the time would come again," I answered, with a laugh, as I glanced at Joy, and noticed that though she was distinguishing herself, as she always did either in music or dancing, yet the mirth had gone out of her face, and was replaced by a false look of animation which I, who knew her well, felt to be more sad than the quiet look of resignation on the faces of other girls who sat patiently, uncourted. Something had evidently happened, and, whatever that something was, she was feeling it a good deal, though she was evidently determined to brave it out.

Two or three men had succumbed at once to that unfortunate fascination which she could not help exercising. It remained for me to decide by a process of natural selection which of the three had worked the mischief, and driven young Markby in anger from the room.

It was *not* the young fellow who was regarded as a future millionaire, who was said to have done "smart things" in the City, and who looked like a respectable grazier, with the air of a churchwarden. Neither was it the gay Lothair, from whom I knew she would shrink, and who was the sort of insolent rascal who would squeeze a girl's fingers as he went through a quadrille with her. Both these admirers had been

treated with equal disdain, and were now sulking near the doorway, and refusing to dance with any one else. But there was a third and far more specious aspirant for her favour, who had taken university honours, and was likely to do well at the Bar. He was not so good-looking as Paul, but his conversation was more ready, and he had received the London as well as the academical polish. Paul was more or less provincial, and I cursed my own folly for not taking better care in looking after my pet, and being drawn away by that unlucky whist, as I overheard Edwin Norman amusing our Joyce, in the pauses of the waltz, by giving her droll little character sketches, stories of clever debates and of political tricks, and making her laugh at his accounts of the democratic independence of the big clubs in town, when once you got into them.

I knew that the laughter was a little forced by the occasional quick glances which she gave at the door, and by the way in which her eyes darted here and there, as if in quest of some one who the gossips were saying ought to be there. And yet when another, and yet another tune was struck up by the band, the two floated away again together, "keeping step with each other perfectly," as the outsiders meaningly observed.

The music began to jar on my nerves, and for the first time in my life I was cross with Mrs. Milner. Why was the mother so infatuated as to sit there in a state of beatitude, rapturously listening to all the flattering nonsense which people were talking about her daughter? Jenny would have had more sense, and less blind confidence in her child. It was only afterwards that I heard how the over-shy mother was feeling like a fixture to that horrid wall against which they remorselessly stuck the chaperons, and how she was doubting if her interference would be of any good.

Neither could I have interfered openly, for fear of drawing eyes upon me, and making matters worse. But I had no more heart for whist, and sought refuge in an adjacent anteroom, where the erections of tall fan-palms and pyramids of azaleas and Virginian cork were considered to be triumphs of art by the Halstead nurserymen. I had sunk into a corner, half wishing that I was comfortably at home in bed, half lamenting, with inconsistency, that I had not insisted on my wife accompanying me, and then again feeling sure that what I had seen that night would disgust her for a long time to come with public balls—when voices which were familiar to me struck upon my ear.

"My darling, don't be angry! but would you mind my

saying that you are making yourself the talk of the room, and that I felt it was better to come out of it than to stay and listen to the sort of chatter which must be lowering and humiliating to both of us?"

"And would you mind my saying that you are very unreasonable, and that it is quite your own fault if people are talking of me? I tell you, once for all, that I mean to enjoy myself. It is dull enough here, as it is, and it will be duller still if I have to mind my p's and q's all my life."

She spoke quite gaily, as if she did not mean what she said to be taken literally. I knew that tone of badinage; she had adopted it from her childhood; but, alas, there was a discord in the usually musical voice, telling of the wild anger rising up in her heart.

I did not hear what he answered, but I knew that he was disturbed, and probably could not restrain the utterance of some bitter truth.

"It is your own fault for dawdling and moping about here," she rejoined as bitterly, adding: "Oh, we shan't do any good by quarrelling! I tell you, once for all, that I don't mean to be kept in order. We must make the best of it now, if we have made a mistake. You don't seem to have much to say to me, though you have called me out here. I hope that, if we have to live together for fifty years, you will learn to be a little more amusing, and also a little more considerate and polite."

Another dance had struck up, and Edwin Norman came up to look for her.

"By your leave," he said lightly, bowing to Paul Markby; and she—she put her hand as lightly on this stranger's arm, and, without another word, went with him into the ball-room.

"Was she ever serious? Did she know what she was doing?"

I asked myself the question almost despairingly, as I decided that I could do no good by making my presence known. For she loved the lad. I knew that she loved him, in spite of her wild words, and that her heart had been aching beneath the laces and flowers, in spite of the voice which had sounded far away and strange, and which had taken him so thoroughly by surprise, that he stood like one shot. Just at first he was too stunned to be conscious of the pain.

## II.

THE rest of that night passed like a dream. I could not bear to look at Joyce as she queened it—the acknowledged belle of the ball—glancing coquettishly at the young fellows who came up to solicit dances, and then looking down with those long lashes, which swept the now flushed cheek, at her card, which had been full so much earlier in the evening.

Perhaps I was a little hard on her, perhaps I did not understand how she congratulated herself on having done what was right and natural in not giving in to mistaken prudery. "Husbands must not be tyrants," as Miss Farley perpetually said, being in advance of her time, and perceiving certain truths which then loomed upon the horizon, and which are now universally accepted by those ladies who choose for their text-book, Mill on the "Subjection of Women."

I found that even Jenny was not entirely on my side. The natural instinct which all good women have to defend their own sex came uppermost as she said:

"You know she likes dancing. You can't expect her to *dis*like it. A girl like that would be made *miserable* if she were kept in thraldom. Mr. Markby ought to think himself happy enough to get her."

I knew that Jenny was hot about it. She always was when she spoke in italics. So I did not argue further, though it was my private conviction that Paul Markby was a fool not to assert himself a little more.

"There is no vigour in his blood, no strength of will in his family; he comes of a stock which is too indolent and pacific," I fumed to myself, when a day or two afterwards—having occasion to call on Mrs. Milner, who was suffering from a cold—I found a magnificent bouquet of stephanotis, white hyacinth, and maiden-hair fern adorning the centre ornament of the unassuming little drawing-room.

"Well, your mother is spoiling you if she humours you to such an extent as to purchase hot-house flowers for you! I prefer the wild ones which you used to gather on the moor," I said, presuming on the freedom of a privileged friend.

The colour flamed up in the girl's cheeks.

"Perhaps she didn't pay for them—perhaps they were a *present*," she said, lowering her voice confidentially.

"Then you have no right to take such presents unless they come from Paul; he can afford to give you everything which it is right for you to have."

I felt like an old bear; but the girl did not resent the speech. I knew that the right way was to deal with her faithfully and plainly.

I heard the sound of a little smothered sob, as she instinctively put her hand over her eyes—perhaps to hide that there were tears in them. There was a long compulsory silence, and then she said :

"He should not make such a fuss; and then he wouldn't tempt me to tease him."

I was afraid of being downright rude, and yet this child had no father, and I had known her from her childhood. So I said firmly, and perhaps a little grimly :

"I am afraid you would find other men make much more of what you call 'fuss.'"

She did not answer, but she removed her hand from her eyes. Quick-brained as she was, she was sharp enough to know that it could not hide the burning cheeks, nor the tell-tale mouth with its tightening lines. She was not accustomed to be spoken to in this way, but I could see that she was giving my words due consideration.

"Well," I said, after another pause, during which she had selected the largest stephanotis from the bunch, and treated it in a way to madden a horticulturist, "you needn't have pulled that poor flower to pieces—you might have let it have its little day."

The water sprang again to her eyes.

"Dr. Meredith, it is too bad of you. You know that I hate covert insinuations. If you want to hint such things, why can't you say them outright?" And she stamped her little foot.

I had been used to these childish outbursts. Under other circumstances I should have laughed outright. As it was, I said gravely :

"What things?"

"Why, that I am cruel; that I want to treat people as I treat flowers—to destroy their short-lived happiness—and all for my own amusement."

"I never said so ; your own conscience spoke."

"Well, it wouldn't do, you see, to give in to Paul *altogether*," she said, with a return of that pretty little way she had of pretending to be very astute, and of taking people into her confidence. "If I let him be masterful *now*, what will he be by-and-by? We are always quarrelling, you know, as it is," she added, with a disdainful curve of her beautifully-modelled lips.

"Well, that seems to me unfortunate."

"Perhaps it is," with a solemn shake of her head. And then, with a sudden flash in her expressive brown eyes: "There are times when I fear that his ways are not my ways, and that we shall never fit in, as I expected. And then again, I *know* that I shall never care—really care for any one else—and I hate myself for vexing him, because, don't you see, he has been so good to me, so wonderfully good, that I have got to please him."

Yes, I *did* see, and was a good deal reassured. It was not possible that the girl could look with her clear eyes so straightforwardly into mine, and take my hand so honestly, if she had ever really intended to set my friend Paul on one side. And, after all, Jenny and I had had some such little episodes in our early married life—I suspect most married people have had occasional tiffs, if they confess the truth—so it was because I did not consider myself to be quite an amateur in such lovers' quarrels that I took upon myself to give sensible advice.

I remember how we decided that there was to be from this day forth a fresh departure in the girl's life. She was to be no longer at one time like a glacier and at another like a raging torrent. She was to receive no more presents of jewellery or flowers, and promised to be on her guard against varying moods. The only thing I could not tell her was not to look pretty. But she gave in to all the rest of my exordium with a meekness and obedience so abnormal in her character, that I might have known this was a phase too good to last. And I am afraid in our enthusiasm for binding up Markby's wounds, and putting him at ease, we had both of us forgotten an important factor in the problem; we had comfortably kept out of view the reality of young Norman's suffering.

My professional experience had familiarised me with every form of human pain, and yet I confess that I shrank back appalled the first time I met Norman after my common-sense prescription had been faithfully carried out. He was like a ghost of his former self, hanging about the place and apparently determined not to take his dismissal. The first time he met me he took no notice of me, whistling somewhat offensively as he went. I then remembered he was reported to have said: "Do you think I am going to have a beggarly, meddling fellow, old enough to be her father, come between us?" I saw that he was powerfully moved, excited almost beyond control, but I did not know that this was the precursor of the simoom.

My wife did her best during the next few months for Joy, and I do think the child began to have higher ideals, and to

understand that there were nobler things to live for than the gratification of her vanity.

We were all of us glad when the time appointed for the wedding drew near. The bracing feeling of approaching winter was already in the air; the swallows were preparing for their annual flight, and the rooks were cawing in the trees at Halstead Park. The game was unusually plentiful that season, and shooting-parties were numerous, ladies often accompanying the sportsmen when they set out for their walk, or being present at their lunches. On one of these occasions Paul Markby looked me up. It struck me at once that he was frightfully put out.

"Bless my heart!" I exclaimed, very much taken aback, for he sent in his card in an officious way though my waiting-room was filled with patients. "What's in the wind now? you must wait for your proper turn." The least I thought was that his mother must be suffering from one of her splitting headaches. But it augured more than ordinary audacity that the young fellow should intrude on me, to tell me that the Brookes had invited Norman and himself to the same shooting-party, and that Joy was staying in the house, and he did not know whether to accept it or not.

"You young people are fractious and impatient, all alike, if life does not give you not only what you want, but what you want in the right way," I answered, a little hurriedly, looking upon his interruption as impertinent nonsense.

"But, Dr. Meredith, you don't understand, you yourself are so brave, and strong, and manly," said the lad, nearly choking in his complication of emotion. "I must meet him face to face, and he has tried to humiliate me. You need not think I care personally, but—but——"

"Let the momentary misunderstanding pass—there can be nothing so foolish as threats bandied to and fro—and nothing so absurd as to accept a rudeness as if it were intended to be kept by you like a trinket or a valentine. Throw it out amongst the rubbish; depend upon it, the wholesome earth and the fresh air will prove the best antiseptics to all such poisonous stuff. But that a man should pocket an offence, wrapping it in cotton wool, taking it out every now and then to show to his friends, I have no patience with such nonsense."

I still spoke a little impatiently. I had not counted on the possibility that Joy's old spirit of coquetry would return to her that day. With the instinct of her sex, she saw an opportunity, and made the most of it, walking in the hot

sunshine at which most girls would have been frightened, and declaring it did not hurt her.

She did not fear anything from Norman, but the man's desperation made him peremptory, and Paul's jealousy led him to suspect her when he saw a late Gloire-de-Dijon rose pinned in her velvet bodice.

"You men *are* cool," she answered, a little defiantly, when he told her he knew perfectly well who had given her the rose. To suspect her was to touch an unfortunate spring in her mental machinery.

"I tell you what it is. I can't forgive that fop; if it were any one else, I should not care a rap," he was beginning excitedly.

"Oh, you are so dreadfully wise," she said, with a sigh.

He looked at the little figure disappearing down the path, and then thought he would follow her. The path looked easy enough, and there was no one to warn him that it might end in death. For there was mischief abroad. The girl seemed to feel it as she shuddered at the breeze. The chilly feeling in the air was stronger every moment. There was no one also to warn *her*, when a few minutes afterwards she met another man who was terribly agitated, and striving with balancing of words and with specious suggestions to cover the emotion which he too was unable to conquer. There was a subtlety in his speech of which she became aware so that it stung her.

"I am *not* a practised flirt. I am not cold and heartless," she said, looking at him with the proud moisture in her eyes. "I know what you mean, and I can't *bear* your allusions. I love Paul Markby, and I always loved him. He is worth a thousand of the clever men who can speak with cutting emphasis to a girl when she is alone with no one to defend her. Let me pass, sir, let me pass."

She looked at him without flinching, feeling that she had not lost an inch of ground in the conversation.

"Oh, it is too bad," she cried, resenting what she thought his contempt. "It isn't fair to attack me when I am alone."

She could not see what he could, a figure which was approaching him from behind her. Both men had fire-arms, and both were practised shots. She never waited to think if it were not cruel on her part to fling out her words so harshly and defiantly. How could she know that it had been the very pain in Edwin Norman which had forced him to be outspoken?

"Oh, it is a shame!" she cried again. "I have told you more than once that I want to pass."

And then no one could tell what had happened, for when we found her standing there—she, the only one to tell—her lips were shut tight. Whether Markby had pulled a trigger to bring down a bird and had shot himself by accident; whether Norman had tried to take Joy's hand and she, in wrenching herself free, had fallen back on her lover and caused his gun to explode; or whether the latter in his stealthy advance had stumbled over his own gun—these were all various theories which were debated in vain, for the only account that any one afterwards could give was that of the bang of a gun, succeeded instantaneously by a shrill, shivering cry, and afterwards by strange sighing sobs.

I was sent for as quickly as possible, happening to be the medical man who was nearest at hand, and also an intimate friend of both the sorrowing families. The messenger who was dispatched on horseback to fetch me could tell me nothing clearly, except that there had been an "haccident," and a gentleman named Markby "had shot hisself." I hoped for the best, as such accidents are sometimes trifling; but as I hastened to the spot I was overwhelmed by a whirl of fears. I shall never forget that scene. It had special accessories which were likely to make me remember it in after years. The shadows were already lengthening in the mellow sunshine of the autumn afternoon as I reached the scene of the "accident"—as every one from that time forth insisted on calling it, and it was fortunately not *my* business to contradict them. But a thought—which made one shiver in the golden light of the sun, and which crept nearer to me, like a shadow blotting out all other shadows, and insisting that I should recognise it, and not put it on one side—seemed to lay a cold hand on my own heart. We doctors have no right to bother ourselves with fancies; it is our duty to be like machines, and to rally to every emergency. Therefore it was that, pulling myself together, I approached that green dingle or "combe," as we called it, with a beautiful glen round it—a favourite spot for luncheon-parties—as calmly and quietly as possible.

Everything was engraven for ever on my memory, so that I can see even now the cattle blandly ruminating in the meadows close to the glen as I rode past them, and the rooks sailing about overhead, fluttering and chattering at the tops of the larger trees, as if something had happened to disturb their quiet. Then I could plainly discern figures moving about in

the slits of light between the trees, with glimpses of boulders of rock, and a little stream of water gurgling like a silver ribbon between the stones. The whole spot was so Arcadian and peaceful that tragedy seemed to be out of place in it, and I myself felt rather tongue-tied when I was obliged to inform the anxious bystanders that nothing could be done for the injured man. The bullet must instantly have entered the brain; death must have been instantaneous; he could not have suffered.

I gave one glance at Edwin Norman, who was pale as ashes, deploring the fatality. And then my whole attention was needed for Joyce, who stood in the same attitude as when she had uttered the cry, apparently taking no heed of any of the people standing by.

"I hope I shall never hear such a cry as that again," whispered one of the other ladies, while the rest were shedding tears.

Joy shed none. The scarlet of her lips had not quite abated, though the colour had flown from her rounded cheeks. Her little teeth were still clenched, as if they had remained so since that terrible scream had forced itself through them. But what alarmed me most was the full agony of the blaze of her wild eyes, and the fact that Norman seemed to shrink from them.

"Why does she look at him so?" whispered the shrewd matron, who had spoken to me before. "*His* gun is all right; he could have had nothing to do with the accident."

"Yes, it is clear enough, poor Markby must have been careless; it was his own gun," I answered at once, thankful to be relieved from the horror of a doubt, which I had not dared to acknowledge even to myself.

The poor girl evidently recognised me, but she could not speak.

"It is like a cataleptic fit of the spirit, she will be better of it presently. Don't you think so, doctor?" asked one of those busybodies who are always ready to appear wise and to chatter most when there is any disaster.

I only shook my head. I had feared at first for her intellect, but when her mother arrived, when the sigh fluttered up from her heart, and the tears fell at last—scorching and heavily, like the lava from a hidden volcano—I no longer had *that* fear.

"She need not talk yet—time enough by-and-by," I said to the agonised mother, not liking to hint at another secret terror. "Get her home and to bed as quickly as possible—away from all these curious eyes. Let her be quiet to-night—what she needs is sleep."

And so it was that Mrs. Milner took advantage of the offer

of a neighbour's carriage, and I saw the ladies safely into it, remaining for some time afterwards with poor Markby's mourning relations, to help them with suggestions about the funeral, and the necessary inquest.

The sun had set when I rode again through the slumberous woods, accompanied by the melancholy *cortège* and trying not to reproach myself morbidly for not sparing Markby a longer time for talk, when he intruded upon my professional hours so impulsively for advice.

After all, it had been my duty to attend to my patients, and who could foresee that such an accident should have happened on this day of all others?

As soon as we reached Halstead, I called again on the Milners, and found the mother, as I had expected, in a state of panic. Her daughter's face had begun to be a terror to her, and she asked me why Joyce should motion with her hands instead of speaking? Was she trying in vain to recover mastery over her maddened brain? The poor woman wrung her hands.

"Oh!" I said, as soothingly as possible, "the brain is all right."

"Then what is it—oh, what is it? We two have been so united, and I made sure when we were alone that she would tell me everything—but she—she only looks at me, as if she had something terrible to tell me, and as if she *could not* tell it."

"She has nothing terrible to tell you; get that out of your mind. There is no cause for the apprehension. It is simply a shock to the nerves caused by that poor young fellow's death."

"But oh, Dr. Meredith, she used to be so strong."

"And she will be strong still. That is my principal hope. You have done your best to rear her healthily. Don't—don't trouble her—get her to sleep. Don't you see that sleep, 'tired nature's sweet restorer,' will do more for her than all the nostrums in the world?"

Nevertheless I was somewhat alarmed at the appealing look in the girl's stiff eyes. They were dry now but sunken with weeping, and they had the piteous look as of some dumb animal appealing for assistance. I think it hurt me most when, after I had administered an opiate, she took my old rough hand and kissed it. For I thought I knew better than any one else the meaning of the heartdrawn sighs, and the expression of the remorseful eyes, which seemed to tell me that nothing could mitigate her penitence. Indeed reports were already flitting about the village that it was because she had aggravated Markby the poor fellow had destroyed himself.

"Why were those three standing together, and why did she

stare at the other man with that look, as if she saw a ghost?" people were beginning significantly to ask.

"Pooh—pooh—the merest coincidence," I found myself answering fiercely; "these coincidences are always happening, and mean nothing at all."

Nevertheless, when I met Edwin Norman, I begged him to keep away from the Milners.

"The less she sees any one whose appearance is likely to recall that horrible shock to her nervous system, the better the chance will be for her cure," I said, thinking little enough about *him*, though it struck me that he looked awfully ill, a thing which was to be expected, and for which, somehow, I had no time to pity him.

The first thing in the morning, I hurried to the Milners, and found that though the opiate had taken effect, and though the mother—who had never closed her eyes—had remained all night in one cramped position, with the head of the sleeping girl pillowed on her bosom, afraid to stir hand or foot, lest she should wake her, yet Joyce was no better.

The eyes seemed, as before, to want to tell us something, and she motioned to her head as if a weight was on her heated brain. Yet the mind was all right, the intelligence unimpaired; the speaking eyes told me enough to make me thankful for that. Though the case was sad enough! It was all the sadder because now, when her physical strength had partially returned, she seemed to be making such terrible efforts to speak. For the efforts were futile. She let fall her arms, with an eloquent gesture of despair. Once again she fondled my hand, as if with an attempt to convey an apology, and finally broke down her mother's self-restraint by putting up her sorrowful face to be kissed, and twining her fingers in a helpless way in and out of her silky hair.

I led the widow into an adjoining room; I saw that she had a dazed feeling of unreality, and that she was beginning to get vexed with me for not explaining what had happened.

"What is it?" she exclaimed, in despair. "You say that the mind is all right, and yet she has not said one word—not uttered one syllable since I took her home last night. If it were anybody else but Joy, I should say it was obstinacy."

"Oh, no, you would not," I answered decidedly, and yet seeing how difficult it would be to break to her the truth. "You will see, she will do her best, if you get a slate and try her with writing."

"You mean that she *cannot* speak," cried the mother, looking almost wrathful, with sceptical eyes.

I saw she had a feeling as if the next moment I should burst into a laugh, and tell her I was hoaxing her.

"Indeed, that is what I mean. I should not make you understand it any better if I were to use a difficult medical word. The shock she has received has deprived her for the present of the power of speech, but the power *may* return to her, either soon in a natural way, or at another shock as sudden. I would advise you to be calm and soothing—do not expect too much; much depends upon *you*."

It was piteous to see the efforts which, after this, Mrs. Milner made at self-control. But I had had but little hope in the remedy I proposed. The slate was brought, and Joyce attempted to write upon it. It was in vain; she shook her head hopelessly. She could form the letters, but, as I explained to her mother, she could not put them together. She had lost the power of spelling; she had forgotten *words*. It was as if a sponge had wiped them clean out of her memory, or as if she were seeking for them where they were banished, in the outworks and corners of her brain.

Her mother, on the whole, bore up splendidly, especially when she found that there were other women ready to make a nine-days' wonder of her child's calamity. When the restraint caused by the first shock of the calamity had passed, many of these women, who had been jealous of the poor girl's beauty, were ready to make unpleasant inuendoes. It was especially when we men were not present that their tongues were unloosed.

I am afraid I lost my temper one day when Miss Delmott began to make remarks in my presence, and to lament the swift Nemesis which had overtaken the "poor misguided young creature." For the life of me I could not help answering sharply that it would be "no great loss to the world if more women were struck dumb."

Edwin Norman had left the place as soon as the inquest was over, at which the jury brought in the verdict of "accidental death," and after the first excitement had passed Joyce Milner was left comparatively alone to fight with an ailment which was more terrible than many horrible forms of sickness. She could take long walks without much fatigue, and seemed to find a diversion in the enjoyment of nature. But if we tried to talk with her, she could only shake her head.

At first I attempted to comfort her mother by reminding her that no very sharp agony or sense of loss could pierce through the comparative stupor which seemed to shut her daughter off from communion with her fellow-creatures. To

call to the beloved departed from whom there can be no answer; to weep for those you love, and who can never come back to comfort you; to be acquainted with the mystery of sorrow, and not to know the explanation of it—these were pangs common to all human nature, from which she seemed to be saved.

A *maladie des nerfs*, one of the more sentimental ladies at Halstead, who prided herself on knowing a little French, called it, adding, with her head on one side, "it is quite romantic."

To me it did not seem to be romantic at all, as day after day and week after week all my resources failed me in trying to cope with the complaint. To think that one who still looked so beautiful, and who had begun to show such inimitable patience, should be, as it were, one among us and yet not of us, was unendurable to me. I rebelled against my own powerlessness when I found her day after day not able to utter any sound which we could understand, whilst others touched the keys of languages so carelessly, so flippantly, so unkindly at times.

"And there are Miss Delmott and all the other hens cackling from morning to night, setting vibrations going which may not cease through endless waves of sound, and all about pettinesses and meannesses, and this poor child and her mother, who love each other so faithfully, shut away from each other, as if they were living in different planets," I thought desperately.

I was determined more than ever to fight with such a state of things. I tried startling the girl's nerves; I tried medicines, changes of diet; I ransacked the medical reviews.

Sea air had utterly failed, but I tried change of scene in London, in Yorkshire, in the Midland counties, and then a remedy delayed to the last because Mrs. Milner shrank from it. She had preferred not to expose her daughter to the chances of foreign travel, dreading the observation to which she might be exposed in hotels in France or Switzerland. But at last I succeeded in overruling her scruples.

It was about a year afterwards, on a crowded steamer on the Lake of Geneva, that Joyce suddenly caught sight of a figure which had vanished out of her life. Mrs. Milner, who had meant sternly to repress all feeling, could not understand the sudden change which was taking place in her daughter. She described to me how it was that a trembling shook her, and a sort of suffocation seemed to oppress her as if she could not breathe. There was a scintillating light as of reviving memories in her expressive face, and then, as if with a wrench which

nearly parted soul and body, she gave another cry like the one she had given when Markby, shot dead, had fallen at her feet. The steamboat, which had been making the tour of the lake, was just then stopping at a crowded landing-place. There was the usual excitement of looking for luggage, paying the captain's fees, meeting with friends and sundry leave-takings, and the young English lady's attack of hysteria, supposed to be caused by the heat, did not attract more than passing attention. Some of the bystanders proposed carrying her into the cabin. Others offered their vinaigrettes or bottles of eau-de-cologne. Scarcely any one attached importance to the words which made Mrs. Milner's heart stand still, even in the joy of her child's returning speech.

"There he is," cried Joyce, standing with parted lips and dilated eyes; "I can tell you at last—there he is. I was silent and could not help myself, but I *must* tell now. There was a struggle between them, and he fell uppermost. Paul was beneath, and they were struggling for the gun. He wrenched it out of Paul's hands and shot him dead with it. Perhaps he did not mean it, but, oh, it was cruel, cruel! He thought no one would know it, for he saw I *could not tell*."

"Who—where—what are you talking about?" cried the bewildered mother, thankful that most people were otherwise employed, and that only a few could comprehend the English language well enough to attach much sense to the words so wildly poured out. Her principal idea was not to search for any one, but to try to screen her daughter from the ridicule and curiosity of strangers.

"Who?—why, *Mr. Norman*," answered the girl, dropping her voice, but still looking eagerly about her.

In another moment Mrs. Milner feared to stand face to face with the man whom her daughter was so wildly accusing. But no one in the least corresponding to her recollections of Edwin Norman was to be seen.

Had he disembarked when Joyce caught sight of him, or had he never been there at all?

No one was ever able to enlighten her, and we afterwards thought it wiser to try to persuade Joyce that it was probably a mistake of identity—such mistakes being very common.

Whether it was so or not—a matter which I was never able to investigate—the sudden shock had done all we wanted; it had restored her power of speech, with all her other faculties. Whether the memory of that portion of her life, which was connected with and succeeded the death of her lover, did not always remain blurred; and whether the wild statement which

she made was or was not visionary and erroneous, I was never able to conclude. It is possible that the very intensity of thought and feeling which she brought to bear on the subject defeated their own object. At any rate, when her health seemed to be fully established, we found it best to discourage her from alluding to the matter. The statement which she had made could have no practical consequences, as it was the isolated statement of one person with nothing to support it.

It had to be sufficient for us that, after a time, Joyce Milner was restored to us.

# AT THE RISK OF MY LIFE

## I.

ALTHOUGH Halstead-on-Sea was a quiet little hamlet in itself, we were not quite shut off from the stirring world. Watering-places of some importance could be easily reached by a modest little line of railway, which had been established at a comparatively recent date, not without much opposition even from educated folk, whilst the poorer sort still shuddered when the snorting engine rushed past their cottages, and associated it in some mysterious way with the devices of the Evil One.

It was not often that I went to the town of Blackquay. But as they had placed my name, much against my will, on what they called a Sanitary Committee, on which there were ladies as well as gentlemen who talked fluently about typhoid, zymotic diseases, and the state of their cisterns and filters, I now and then made a spasmodic effort to present myself at these formidable meetings, from the tyranny of which I found it impossible to shake myself free. By-and-by, when I go on with these stories, you will understand why I hated them, and why I preferred the quieter and less ambitious philanthropy which had been first of all inaugurated by a leading spirit like Miss Farley.

In vain I chafed against these committees, with their inevitable small squabblings, their frequent misunderstandings, their jealousies, their littlenesses, and their despotism, as galling if not as far-reaching as that of a secret society. In vain I declared that a London doctor would never have

submitted to such thraldom. Alas, the partner of my existence put her veto with decision on my every symptom of revolt, and helped to fasten the yoke more firmly round my neck.

"I tell you what it is, Tom; it is a fad of yours not to like committees, but you must look upon them as necessary. Yours is a critical position, there is so much competition in the present day; and, if you stay away and have Dr. Smythe's name put on that committee instead, it will injure your chances of practice even at Halstead. And then there are the boys to think of," Jenny added, with pretty insistence. She always quoted the "boys" when she wanted to work on my professional pride.

So I had to submit meekly. A more courageous soul might have declared a preference for the old-fashioned ladies who kept to croquet, Berlin wool, and amateur music, and might have confessed an inclination to give a wide berth to the more learned ones who set on foot the complicated machinery of sanitary committees.

Only once had I ventured to hint at anything so disloyal. And then, with a tone in her voice as if her temperature were sinking a few degrees below freezing, my little wife had made answer:

"You know, Tom, that is just because all your own *dicta* are not submitted to at once. And you *cannot* expect clever women to be subservient."

"Of course not," I said hurriedly. "I only wish I could hasten the millennium, which every British householder is told to expect, when all the land is to be honeycombed with sanitary committees; and of course I know quite as well as you do that there are womanly women who can serve society without neglecting family duties."

Nevertheless, more than once that afternoon I found myself saying, at that committee, "We cannot undertake to work miracles."

It was but a few weeks since we had parted with the Milners. I was somewhat out of spirits, not having heard from them, so that I was scarcely in a humour to take kindly to the new scientific improvements on which I was expected to give an opinion. Many of them seemed to me rather far-fetched, and some of the elaborate drawings of houses and plans of pipes which were submitted to me proved so bewildering, that a man not gifted with superhuman intelligence could hardly be expected to understand them at once. And the fact that a young engineer, who had come down from London, and happened to have heard my name, button-holed me, and showed up every

point on which I happened to be ignorant, became intolerably tiresome and boring.

I felt a little more in my natural element when the committee was over, and I was able to breathe freely as I sauntered on my way back to the outskirts of Blackquay.

But things were destined to go awry. For as I passed some half-drunken men who were walking unsteadily, shouting out tipsy songs, it occurred to me that I might be of some assistance to two respectable-looking females who were walking at a little distance behind the fellows who were disgracing themselves. The road was a lonely one leading to the railway-station.

"Never mind, my good women, don't you be afraid. *I* will take care of you," I said, hastening up to them, with the self-sacrifice of a Don Quixote.

"Lor, sir, they be our 'usbands," retorted one of the women, fiercely turning upon me.

"You go 'ome, sir, and take care of your own missus at 'ome," cried another boldly and impudently, her words being greeted with shouts of laughter.

Never was I more thankful to get back to our quiet Halstead, a very paradise for those who like rest and healthful air, wood and moor, and shining water. Here, I thought, I could dream and meditate, like a lotus-eater, when my work was done. Yet, as usual, I was not to be allowed to be "careless of mankind." For, as I jumped down at the little station with two or three humble travellers whose faces were familiar, I was fascinated by a pair of curiously dreamy eyes, with lids drooping at their outer ends, which were strange to me, and seemed to be fixed upon me as if asking for assistance.

They belonged to a lady whom I had never seen before, and who stood leaning against the door of the little waiting-room, with an abandonment in her attitude, and a weary droop of the whole figure, which struck me as unusual. She interested me at once; she looked as if she had a story. I noticed that she was dressed in mourning; also that her face was one of strange attractiveness, rather from its singularity and its piteous expression, than its mere physical beauty. It did not escape me that there was something unusually graceful in her pose, and that the proportions of her form might be said to be statuesque. She had absolutely no luggage. That was singular in itself, and it was also singular that she should come to a place like Halstead, which was so little frequented, and at such an hour in the evening with no one to meet her.

Well, it was no business of mine. I probably should have thought no more of the matter, if a storm had not seemed to

be coming on when I left the little station. Now a storm was by no means an unusual occurrence on our surf-beaten coast. Flying showers were said, by the artists who sometimes visited us, to add to our sky effects. There was always much to admire and interest one in these storms, and I had become inured to them long ago.

Yet I suddenly remembered the lady with a sort of qualm. Was she making a pedestrian expedition? Did she know that ours was *not* an aspiring watering-place, where it would be easy to find lodgings? Was she aware that our village lay in watery latitudes? It was curious, but I had noticed that she had no umbrella. Something in those dreamy eyes haunted me. I wanted my supper badly; I was in a hurry to get home to Jenny. But it seemed as if my feet took possession of me, and dragged me forcibly back to the railway-station, to do what I could for the strange lady.

When I came back, to my great surprise, she was still leaning against the door of the waiting-room, with something inexpressibly forlorn in her attitude. The last train had been in for the night; and the station-master was pacing up and down the platform as if he did not know exactly what to do. I advanced towards her, but she took no notice. I could not help thinking that there was a down-trodden look in the poor creature's face, which married women who are not happy often get. I had so frequently seen this look of misery, which seemed to tell that one of our own sex had had the making of it, that somehow I was already prepared to hear that this woman, like others, had fled from injustice or cruelty.

I stood in front of her. Still she took no notice.

"Can I look for your luggage, or call you a fly?" I found myself asking.

She shrank into herself, as if she resented my addressing her.

"I have no luggage," she said at last, still looking dreamily away, as if I was an object beneath her consideration.

"Oh-h!" I remarked.

It was not a very original observation, but as there seemed to be nothing else to say, I relapsed into silence.

There was a pause—very skilfully calculated, as I flattered myself, and I ventured again:

"Do you know it is beginning to rain? I am afraid the storm will be a bad one."

It was astonishing how flat this suggestion fell. Most women, reminded that a bad storm was coming on, and they umbrellaless, cloakless, and far from any house of shelter,

would have fluttered about like sea-gulls, with little cries of distress. But my new friend still stood in a Ristori-like attitude, as if she were glued to that door.

"You can't stay here all night," I said once more, desperately. "Will you—will you—allow me to escort you? You are quite welcome to a share of my umbrella." (I unfurled it to show that it was an exceedingly large one.) "And, if you are going to Halstead, we can call a fly."

A strange, new light came into her face. It was hardly gratitude, and yet she accepted my offer. I almost wished I had not made it, as I noticed the humorous look which flitted over the face of the station-master, as we—doubtless an oddly-matched couple—marched solemnly away together, I offering my arm, which she touched with the tips of her fingers. Perhaps she had never before heard of this old-fashioned custom.

The modest conveyances which sometimes stood at the entrance of the little station had all gone long before. But, as the rain was beginning to descend in great splashes, I took my companion to some livery stables, and ordered a fly.

"Tell me where to drive you. Where is your home?" I said, as we waited in a little room adorned with wax flowers, sea-shells made into pincushions, and pictures of the Royal family.

At the word "home" she went into a fit of somewhat strange laughter.

"I have run away from 'home,' if you call it a home. I never had a home in the right sense," she said at last, sinking her voice, and relapsing into her former melancholy.

Awkward! though it was just as I expected. But my chivalrous feelings received a sudden shock. I began to foresee possible complications, yet how could I abandon a lady who was homeless on such a night? It seemed to me that she suddenly read my thoughts. She looked at me with those strange eyes which had lost their seeming unconsciousness. There was a sort of glitter in them as she drew a purse out of her pocket and opened it, displaying bank-notes and gold. I had not been thinking of the money, and yet at the same time I was aware that the fact of her being so well supplied would relieve us from a difficulty.

The night was a somewhat dismal one, with the howling wind, the driving rain, and darkness which had set in before the astronomical hour. My new friend shivered as she drew her lace shawl round her, and I could not help informing her that people who came to Halstead generally found it necessary to bring winter clothing. Not that she would want it always, for our hamlet, as I further observed, was more sheltered than

the country round, as it was prettily situated in a charming nook, where the winds whistled high overhead and harmlessly by. To all this sort of talk, which I intended to be genial and which exerted me not a little after my hard day's work, she vouchsafed no answer. So that I was glad enough to relapse into that golden silence which is more precious to hard-worked doctors than to most other people.

The drive was a short one, bringing us quickly to my house. It was not without a slight foreboding of how Jenny would take it, that I jumped out to be in time to prepare her for the fact that I had brought her a guest.

"Only for one night," I explained, presuming on what I knew to be a weakness in my little woman. "You always say you think gentlewomen are more to be pitied when they have bad husbands than very poor women."

"Yes; it is worse to have one's heart broken than one's bones."

"And, if I mistake not, here is a real case of a heart thoroughly broken. I am not so ready to believe in it when there is much talking and fuss; but here there seems to be anguish which is silently repressed, and misery without lamentations or tears."

"And you are the Good Samaritan?"

My wife not only took it quietly, but rewarded me with a kiss. She put the stranger in her best bedroom, determined not to be outdone in generosity by me. Her thoughts about the unhappy one banished sleep till the cocks began to crow, and kept her on the tiptoe of expectation the next morning. In vain I tried to warn her against being inclined to "gush." She had so instantly closed with my theory about the malignancy of an unknown husband that her imagination refused to take in any other possibility. And yet, after she had taken up a tempting breakfast to her guest's room, she came back disconcerted.

"Well, Jenny, did you get her to unbosom herself to you?"

"That is *so* like a man to suppose one can throw off one's reserve all at once. What would you think of *me*, Tom, if I was like that wretched Hezekiah, ready to show all my treasures to strangers?"

I knew this was an answer to put me off; for, in fact, Jenny was one of the most open and transparent of mortals.

"Well," I said, a little impatiently, "I suppose she told you *something*—where she comes from—and what she came for—for instance?

"Did you think I should put her through a whole catechism of questions? And after a journey too, when that rushing through fields and cuttings, and flashing through stations, is so apt to get on one's nerves, and make one strained and uncomfortable?"

I saw I could get nothing out of my wife. Whatever she thought, she was not one to turn against a sister in distress.

"It was the right thing, I suppose, to bring her here last night," I said, hesitating a little.

"Of *course* it was," flashed my *alter ego*. "No man with a scrap of chivalry in him could have done anything else. Why, you wouldn't have turned a dog out in a storm like that."

"But," I added, deliberately finishing my sentence, "the sooner we find a lodging for her the better."

We set about it at once. Unfortunately the only lodging which just then remained unoccupied looked dull, gray, and uninviting under the leaden sky of that morning, though it might have been picturesque enough on a sunny day. The walls and roofs were covered with lichen and moss of rich variegated colours, and stained gray in other parts, where the stone was exposed to the action of the weather. Our friend, who, by-the-bye, had never told us her name, and did not seem to be in a hurry to confide in us, shuddered and turned pale as she entered it, but was visibly embarrassed when Jenny asked her if she was faint, and wanted to ply her with sal volatile. She muttered something about never having been faint in her life, and I thought her a little ungracious as she added that she had a horror of medicine.

Of course we laughed. It was then for the first time that she heard how she owed her night's lodging to a medical man. I could not tell why she was startled, nor why there was an evident change in her manner to me. She did not even smile, though Jenny's laugh was infectious. She met every subject with a gravity which was unusual in one so young. We pitied her in her lonely quarters, and suggested a maid, or that she should send for a companion. She negatived both proposals; though after a day or two it became evident that she needed some one to look after her, and evidently considered housewifery to be beneath her notice.

She spent most of her time in wandering about aimlessly, and I often found her seated by a little stream which meandered from the river, clear as crystal, among massive

boulders. A few wild flowers still lingered on the borders of this stream. She plucked them, and put them in her dress, so that I could not help wishing that she had visited the spot a month or two earlier, when the wild flowers had lifted their pretty, pert, nodding heads faster than the village children could root them out. A few blossoms of the blue myosotis and spikes of golden-rod lingered still, strangely tenacious of life. But the flights of buzzing, capricious insects, with their feathery or their scaly wings, had long since disappeared.

I remarked that the cold had killed them, when I passed her wandering near the banks of that stream one day, as if it had a fascination for her which I did not understand.

"Happy little things!" she said, to my surprise.

"Why? Death comes to all men as well as to insects."

"Ah, but not so easily," she said, relapsing into her usual vagueness, as she looked in her strange way out to the sea-line where there was a stretch of dull, gray cloud.

Apparently she was afraid of furnishing me accidentally with some index to her thoughts. Sometimes when we talked to her she made languid attempts at seeming interested, and then again drew into herself, as if she dreaded betraying something. She was a "living riddle," as even Jenny began to complain, though in general my wife protected the new-comer from the curious inquiries of people who did not know her.

"I think it is pleasant to have a change. It breaks the dull level of monotony," said Mrs. Jenny, "to meet some one who is not exactly like the other people you meet."

As day after day passed, we tried to disguise from each other how odd we thought it that our visitor still withheld her name, and that no inquiries had been made for her, and no letters came. "Madam" they called her in the village, "Mrs. Smith" I had tried to christen her. But all these were subterfuges.

"She is evidently in hiding," I said to Jenny, after the third day; "perhaps a lady swindler. Only think—suppose we should be making ourselves accessory to a theft?"

"What nonsense you talk, Tom!" Jenny said, with a show of indignation. As if I did not know that the same thought was passing through her busy little brain as she looked out of the window at our favourite moor, which was becoming of a washed-out looking complexion just now, with the golden gorse all withered, and a meeting line of dull vegetation and non-descript sky at the horizon.

"I wish you could read the solution of the mystery there; but I do not think it is very likely," I said, with a sigh.

It has so often happened to me to be prompted by instincts, which I can hardly explain—a sort of intuition of brewing mischief—that I did not attempt to account to myself for the persuasion which haunted me that day that it might be better for me to look in on "Madam."

I had nothing to gain by it. She was not only unlikely to send for me, but had confessed to an antipathy for medical science. And I need not say that I should have had a conscientious objection to reaping profit from a case of this kind till I knew how the money was acquired. I was somewhat surprised when I reached the stone house to find it empty, except for the simple-hearted landlady, whom I knew to be as honest as the day, and to whom I had been glad to recommend a lodger certain to pay, because I remembered that the woman was the mother of a pack of hungry little ragamuffins, who, according to her account of it, were physiological monstrosities constantly eating their heads off.

"I be so glad as you hev cum, sir," she said, dropping a curtsy, "that lady as you sent us do frighten us hawful at times; she shrieks out a' nights till they lads wakes up and ses, 'Mammy, we be scared o' bogies!' And bless yer 'eart, when I gets up to see as all is raight, she be a-lying with them eyes, big as saucers, a-starin' out at nothin'. I do b'lieve as she never closes 'em. Pay, sir! yes, pay through the nose she wuld anything ye ask her; but lor', I bain't one to take advantage o' that sort."

It struck me that "that sort" was pronounced in a scornful way. I did not wait to hear more, especially when I learned that the lady had been out alone in stormy weather for hours. That strange dread of impending evil quickened my footsteps as I hunted the beach with its gray waves, dull and heavy, falling with a sudden thud on the shingle, while far off was the flash of breakers with measured ominous roll.

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## II.

NOT a creature was on the beach; not a boat was on the sea. Nothing, in fact, could live in that ocean on a squally day like this. To walk on the cliffs was almost dangerous, with the wind mauling your person, and tearing at your clothes. Madam

had generally seemed afraid of it, shrinking back with an odd loathing from the idea of nearing the great sea.

What then was my astonishment to find her seated on a spur of the cliff, with the hair thrown about her head, from which the hat had fallen, surveying the ominous depths beneath her, as if she could not remove her eyes from the tumbling mass of waters!

"Come away," I shouted sternly, as if I would summon my own will to enforce obedience. "Don't you know that you have no business to sit there?—it is dangerous."

Her eyes looked straight into mine, for the first time that I remembered they had done so. For once I seemed to penetrate through the veil which obscured her real nature. There was an expression in them as if a dull fire was burning in her soul. I saw I must exert authority.

"Come away," I said, stretching out to her and taking one of her hands by force.

Was it fancy that she made an effort to throw me off, at the risk of destroying my footing and jerking me over the cliff? Fortunately I had taken the precaution of balancing myself well, and my feet were firmly grounded against a rock. What troubled me more was that it could scarcely be an accident. For she seemed to be aware that I knew she had tried to overbalance me.

She was meek and cowed at once, no longer offering resistance, but letting me draw her to a position of safety.

"Why do you?" then she wailed. "Why do you take such care of me? Who told you I was here? Who sent you to me?"

That was a question I could hardly have answered, even to myself. I parried it by another.

"Did you know that a gust of wind might have blown you off that cliff? Already your hat has gone."

She felt absently for that missing article of dress, and then made a futile attempt to bind up the long strands of dark hair which were lashing her face.

"I could not sleep," was all she answered. "I have not slept for nights."

"Foolish people think it easier sometimes," I said, with a return of my stern manner, "to give themselves the eternal instead of the temporal sleep. But the medical aid which you so despise may help you to the latter, and it is possible to wake up in the other world and find one's self mistaken about the former."

"You are a bold speaker," she said, with a dark look, "but you have no right to say such a thing as that to me."

"If it was a wrong thing to say, I apologise for it," I answered, and added—ready enough to attribute any mental disturbance to a physical origin, "But you are worn-out and exhausted, and you had better let me lead you home."

For I still feared a false step in the heedlessness of her excitement, just where the cliff shelved down to the sea.

She sighed, and let me have my way.

After that day, there was an entire change in the relation between us. She seemed to be partly afraid of me, and partly to look to me for help. Always underlying our intercourse there was a consciousness that I knew something about her which other people did not know. I thought it necessary to give the landlady a hint that she should be watched, but Madam did not make an attempt to leave the place, as I had rather expected she would. On the contrary, she seemed more and more to succumb to the languor, which was compatible with a perfect state of physical development. While I thought it better to maintain the mastery, I was conscious of a sort of shrinking from her. Physically, she was a beautiful structure, and I ought to have raved about her perfect proportions, considering I was an enthusiastic anatomist. But I never could care about the garment of the spirit merely as a garment. And as this stranger's bodily health improved, so that she ceased to scream at night, and slept most of her time, my interest ceased in her. Not so with Jenny. She prided herself, no doubt rightly, on a better comprehension of the vagaries of her own sex. The mystery still haunted her: she harped on it continually.

When the winter days set in—in that aggressive way in which they generally did at Halstead—and when the heavy swell of the Atlantic was dashed into miniature Niagaras against our battlements of rock, it was noticed that Madam became like one of those creatures which hibernate during the reign of frost and snow, sleeping and dreaming most of her time.

"She just eats and sleeps, sleeps and eats—more nor half her time, and the rest of it she will lie and look into the fire for hours together—and sometimes she'll cry—quietly to herself like—but nothing more than that," the landlady explained.

"Depend upon it," said my wife, "it is just the reaction—and that sort of dull ache is the worst kind of sorrow. It comes after a heavy, blinding blow, when one feels that there is nothing left for one to take up again in life—and yet one *must* go on living—oh, how she must have suffered!"

It was of no use to argue with Jenny. She was certain that

the poor lady was worn out with thought and agony, and equally certain that if she herself had had some such cruel blow, she would have been thankful to fall asleep, only to court the lazy god again when she awoke to the same misery, the same torturing round of thought. Meanwhile I tried still to maintain my ascendency over the stranger, but I was afraid to strain the situation too far lest a strand should give way of the yielding rope. I tried to remonstrate with her on the habit of doing absolutely nothing.

"What do you see in the fire?" I asked her playfully, one day.

She shivered in the old way.

"You would not understand."

"Oh, yes, I think I should. You see a crowd of people, landscapes, flowers——"

"Nothing so pleasant as that," she said, dropping her voice to a whisper. "I see faces that haunt me, and, oh, I have such strange, horrible visions."

"That is your own fault; you think without order and direction."

"No; I tell them to come sometimes, and they come; but I tell them to go, and they don't go."

"But it depends on yourself, if you lose this power of the will. You are like a person who dreams even when you are awake. It is a frightful form of illness—you ought to shake yourself out of it."

"Illness?" she repeated; looking interrogatively at me, and passing her hand in a disturbed way over her brow. "Yes, once I was very ill. It was then I learnt to hate doctors. But I am not ill now. My appetite is very good, and I sleep well—quite well."

I was almost afraid of my experiment, for the excitement was returning to her face. Its expression seemed to be brighter, as if she were emerging from that nebulous mist which had surrounded her for some weeks. Was it well to wake her out of it?

"It is a bad habit," I repeated; "you are not really well. It is all very well when the visions are pleasant ones, but one is apt to get terrible and depressing dreams, when the brain is unoccupied, and the mind thoroughly empty. I have known people come even to believe in them."

"Then you think it isn't true?" she cried eagerly, with the old glitter in her eyes.

"What isn't true?"

"Why, the little baby that is crying so, shut out in the

darkness and cold. It has a red mark round its neck, and I sleep as much as I can not to hear its cries. It used to come knocking with its tiny fists against the window-panes, 'Let me in, let me in;' and then the landlady said I screamed."

Now I thought I was getting at the clue. She was suffering from an hallucination, apparently a harmless one. But, by careful treatment and perfect quietness, it might be possible to get her out of it. I tried my best without austerity to give her some simple teaching, to show how irresolution and an excitable imagination might lead to a sort of mental vertigo, a thorough unbalancing of the judgment. I hoped by degrees to obtain her confidence, and restore her to her friends.

I attached no importance to her statements about the baby. Indeed, I felt rather like a spy when the landlady, whom I had set to watch, came to me the next morning.

She had made an important discovery. At the bottom of a dressing-bag, habitually used by the lady, was a little paper parcel, tightly screwed together. When examined it was found to contain a little child's sock, and on the paper which enclosed it was a scribbled address; the name of the town and street had been apparently torn off, but the other name was still decipherable, "Roger Campion, Esq."

I was angry with the woman. She seemed to me to have exceeded her orders. If I was not ready to close at once with Jenny's instant conviction that the name "Roger Campion" belonged to the cruel and despotic tyrant, who had driven his wife from her home, neither did I see my way at present to active interference in the matter. The name was an uncommon one; we might advertise for the gentleman. But at present this was an extreme step. I sent the woman back instantly to restore the paper.

But, apparently, the parcel had been missed, for the next time I called on "Madam" I found an entire change of symptoms.

"How are you, Mrs. Smith?" I asked her, speaking cheerily.

"You know I am *not* Mrs. Smith," she answered fiercely.

"It was the name I decided to call you; you would not tell me the right one, and you know we said you *must* have a name, or they would gossip in the village."

"What do I care for their gossip? You have pretended to be my friend. I hoped you would have protected me against my enemies, and yet you have dogged me, and set spies on me; you are like all other men."

"I am very sorry," I began. Then seeing that apologies

were useless, and letting my curiosity get the better of me, "I hope you have not suffered much from *men?*"

I regretted the question as soon as I asked it, for the expression of her face seemed to be changed again. A sort of cunning overspread it; it was as if she saw some opportunity and was determined to avail herself of it. Her breath came pantingly as she drew a chair next to mine, and looked up into my face with clenched teeth and burning eyes:

"I must tell you—I *must.*"

Then she began a long story in a vague, rambling way of talking, not unpicturesque, but lighted up by flashes of feeling so intense and passionate that I felt inclined to draw my chair back from hers, only it would not do to show how she alarmed me.

She told me of her girlhood as a rich heiress, petted and courted, and how she had formed an attachment unknown to her widowed mother. She had been so foolishly imprudent as to become entangled early in an engagement to marry a man who was a mere adventurer, and a good many years older than herself. This fellow intimidated her, telling her that the announcement of her engagement would startle her mother, and that it would be the lesser evil of the two to make the marriage an accomplished fact before announcing it. But the beginning of dissimulation proved, as usual, to be not only difficult but disastrous in its results, so that as soon as the widow heard of the runaway marriage she showed symptoms of serious illness, and never recovered from the blow. Young Mrs. Campion was then taken to her husband's house; her money was frittered on her husband's extravagances, and she was subjected to such numberless small humiliations that I said to myself, as I listened to the narrative, "The man could not have been a gentleman." I seemed to know the type of plausible coxcomb, who shows himself in his true colours directly he has a woman under his thumb.

"I would have borne all his ill-treatment," she said with flashing eyes, "if they had not separated me from my child. They said I was not fit to have the charge of him. When I heard they meant to take him away from me, I determined again to fly, as I had done once before—but now to better purpose. I stole away one night with my baby, but they tracked me and followed me—and the landlady of the hotel in London was *base.* I confided my story to her, but she sent for my friends, as she called them, and betrayed me. They separated me from my child in spite of my tears and cries. One little sock fell off—it was all that remained to me. Then

my husband put me somewhere with people to take care of me. 'Be quiet,' he said, 'or they will think I have a lunatic for my wife.' They caught at the word 'lunatic.' They said my imploring looks revealed that I was beside myself, and ought to be in confinement. Once more I made my escape, this time to go to my husband, to fall on my knees and implore him to give me back my child. What do you think he did to me *then?*"

She shuddered; I had noticed that an ashy paleness had spread itself over her face, that the glitter of her eyes was increasing, and that she had been talking for some time as if contending with her own thoughts, and caring little about the presence of any listener. I noticed also that the panting of her breath had increased, that she was fumbling in the folds of her dress as if making for something she had secreted. She had drawn nearer and nearer as she was speaking, and now she held something glittering close to my face.

"Why," she cried, with sudden effort, "he said, 'I will find means to quiet you, as you would not be quiet before,' and what he tried to do was *this.*"

Her eyes were fascinating me again by looking straight into mine, as they had done once before. I tried to free myself from their thraldom, and had just time to see that the flash of something bright was as the brightness of metal, that her little hands were busy, but that she was confused. Instinctively I tried to dash the bright thing on one side. There was a report, a sensation as of specks before my eyes. Then an interval of darkness and quietness, and just for a little while I remembered no more.

I have always had a theory that the detaching of our souls from the matter which we call our bodies, need not necessarily be associated with an active pain. What proof have we that there will be the painful wrench which so many of us dread?

The testimony of many who have been recovered from drowning, or even from the suffocation caused by hanging, tells only of a floating away either into the regions of vivid consciousness, or sometimes of obscure cloudy thoughts. In my own experience the first feeling of horror quickly left me. I seemed to hear great guns, and then the sparks of fire, which had at first been uncomfortable, changed into rainbows, rosy clouds, and beautiful fireworks. The artillery in my ears became a sort of music. I felt as if I were borne away on it, and then all was blank.

So soothing was the feeling, not only of numbness, but

quietness and comfort, that I was at first almost inclined to regret it when I woke from my stupor, and found myself in my bed carefully tended by Jenny, who would not allow me to speak, but told me that my friend and rival, Dr. Smythe, had been sent for from Blackquay, and that he pronounced the wound not to be dangerous, but trusted that I should soon be in a fair way to recovery.

"What an imprudent man you were, Meredith," he said to me, by way of comfort, "to trust yourself alone with a patient suffering from homicidal mania!"

And then I heard for the first time that my real danger had been from loss of blood. I had swooned, being alone, and the unfortunate lady had been found shedding tears over me, wringing her hands, and exclaiming, "Oh, he has been so good to me!"

"You had a very near shave of it," said Dr. Smythe solemnly.

There was no more hesitation about advertising for Roger Campion now.

By my own wish, and that of Jenny, the circumstances under which I had received my wound had been hushed up as much as possible, and the patient remained under charge of suitable people till the advertisement succeeded—the name being an uncommon one. The husband, who was a remarkably quiet-looking man, had himself been making inquiries, but entirely without result. The final flight of his wife had been effected with singular cunning, and Halstead was the last place at which they had thought of making search. The strange part of the matter was that there proved to be scarcely a shadow of truth in the story which she had told me to enlist sympathy for herself. It was true that, to her distempered imagination, her feelings had been outraged; true, also, that she had passionately loved her child, and that it had been necessary to take it from her, because she had tried to kill it.

"She had an upside-down sort of conscience," as Jenny declared. But I had no doubt that poor Mrs. Campion believed in her fictitious history more strongly than in her real one. From a girl she had liked to idealise herself, and had conceived morbid aversions, as sudden as they were miserable, for the people whom she had formerly loved. One of her fancies was that her relations were entering into a plot against her.

The shadow of foundation in her story was that she was an heiress, and that Mr. Campion had married her when she

was an orphan girl, the possessor of large property, which, in one of her impulsive moods, she utterly refused to have settled upon herself.

"If I was to blame," said the unfortunate man, "it was partly because I was her only legal guardian, and I could not endure it to be said that I had possessed myself of her property, and then had her shut up in a lunatic asylum at my own suggestion."

Then *that* part of her history had been an entire fabrication; she had never been in confinement. I myself had often deplored the law by which "an order" could be made by anybody, and on the statement of anybody.

I had always shrunk as much as possible from being one of the two medical men, who, provided they have a diploma, can examine a patient separately, and commit him to a seclusion which is more hopeless than imprisonment for crime. But in the case of this lady I could hesitate no more. Her mental qualities might perhaps be never wholly restored, but there would be hope for her under proper treatment. She was shrewd to a degree, and it was thought better not to tell her of the appearance of her husband, as he had more than once threatened to have her placed under restraint.

We consulted together, and it was decided that, when a day arrived brighter and finer than others, I should persuade her to accompany me in a country drive. Just at that time she was ready to do anything I asked. Her compunction had increased her liking for me, and when I pleaded my weakness, she took readily to the idea of driving me herself. The driving was wild and desperate, and when we came to a hill—one of the steepest hills round Halstead—she suddenly burst into a mocking laugh, threw the reins on the horse's neck, and in an instant we were rushing at headlong speed, with the momentary expectation that the carriage would be overturned. How I managed to get the reins again into my hands, and to humour her by coaxing her to "teach me to drive," and how she instantly launched into tales of her exploits on the hunting-field, would take me too long to tell. I listened to none of these tales, for hers was one of those slatternly minds, so wanting in the perception of truth that she had long ago ended by deceiving herself; and although it is seldom possible to localise a mental lesion, and decide exactly the extent of the mischief, probably this defect of hers had always been tolerated. The maniacal violence was another matter, and no sooner was she alone with me in the fresh air than I began to estimate the difficulty of my task. I had to call on Dr.

Smythe to get him to sign the certificate, but she followed me from room to room, though she could scarcely have suspected my object. Once when I stood at the open window under the pretence of looking at the view, I found her standing behind me, and started back to avoid a dexterous push.

We stopped for lunch at the hotel on the way, when she suddenly proposed to cut the bread herself, and I was just in time to catch at the knife and avoid a dangerous wound. Altogether I was never more thankful than when I got rid of my uncomfortable patient, committing her to a *maison de santé*, from which we trusted she might be released after proper means had been adopted for her cure.

# A MAN HUNT

## I.

IT was not often that we had the sensation of a burglary at Halstead, but a year or two before the catastrophe which happened to Paul Markby most of the ladies were in a state of panic and flutter about a gang of thieves, which was known to be haunting the neighbourhood. Robberies are said not to come "in single spies, but in battalions," like misfortunes.

From one of the country houses near Halstead a lady's diamonds had been stolen; in another certain boxes and cupboards in the house had been broken open, and the professional thieves had made off with their contents without detection. So great was the stir of excitement, of hysteria and agitation, that my practice greatly increased, especially among the women.

"Oh! why doesn't somebody *do* something?" cried Miss Delmott and her nervous little friend, Miss Elsey. The latter was an inoffensive little body, but a singularly helpless one. She was always appealing for assistance, on the ground of being an unprotected female, and crying, "Oh! please do something."

"One would think the men in Halstead were all asleep," said Miss Delmott severely, with an emphasis which I resented as personal.

Really it was rather hard to stand; they had no right to vent their indignation upon *me* because the criminals had escaped detection, and my respect was increased for Miss Farley's shrewdness and intelligence when that lady remarked, in her usual didactic way, that "if the police in a great place

like London were not sufficiently trained, or of sufficient ability to ferret out burglaries and murders, it was absurd to expect too much from the modest little force at Halstead."

"For my part, *I* never think of going to sleep until I have looked into every hole and corner in the house," sighed Miss Elsey.

But, considering that Miss Elsey's comical little bird's nest was only one amongst a number of larger habitations, it did not appear that this energetic act was likely to benefit the community.

"I assure you," added Miss Delmott to her intimate friend, "there is not an artist, or a well-dressed workman, or an invalid new to the place whom I do not look at through my eyeglass to see if his complexion is stained, or if he wears a wig. I walk down to the railway-station twice in the day, and if I see a man with a black bag I generally give a hint to the police."

This was decidedly hard on my patients, and on the meek-looking country parsons who came to attend religious meetings, invariably carrying umbrellas and black bags.

I felt my own nerves beginning to feel affected by all this feminine fuss, and lost my patience when I found that even Jenny required to be assured that detectives were only human beings.

"The fact is," I said, a little spitefully, "you will find that it is only in ladies' novels that such people are credited with supernatural gifts."

"But these rascals want some one to cope with them," answered Jenny, in her most wheedling way, "and I know no one more likely to think of something helpful than you, Tom."

"In fact, you want *me* to turn into an amateur detective. Thank you, my dear, I decline to put my talents to a test so crucial."

I prided myself on being of a peaceable tendency, but somehow various cases turned up in my practice more or less connected with the doings of these rascals. It so happened that owing to the blundering of the police the fellows seemed especially to have directed their strategy to isolated country houses, and even small rectories.

Now, there was a little country rectory only three miles from Halstead where the parson and his wife were not on the best of terms. More than once I had been called to them when words had run high between them. The young wife was one of those aggravating mortals who could say the most biting things and indulge in the most bitter sarcasm, without

raising her voice or allowing the serenity of her face to be disturbed. Her husband was many years older than herself, and I could soon see that she counted on his being flustered and exasperated by the sharp sarcasms which were so skilfully veiled beneath a quiet repose of manner. He was a passionate, well-meaning man, who bitterly regretted his own violence as soon as the occasion had passed. He invariably placed himself in the wrong, and I had more than once pitied him for the actual physical irritation under which he had been labouring, and had felt convinced that it was civilisation alone which had prevented him from venting his spleen on his irritating partner in the more vulgar method which would have been adopted by the uneducated Gurth. Skilfully as we laboured to hide the shame of it, I felt convinced that sooner or later it must be publicly known. But in my wildest surmises I had never guessed how speedily a separation would be brought about between this childless and ill-mated pair by nothing more important than a band of burglars.

The Rev. Charles Kingdon, who was said by the lady to be "something of a fidget," had not departed on a journey without especial directions to his wife, given with all the brief emphasis of the master, to take proper care of the silver goods, which were heirlooms in his family, and to lock up early every night, as thieves were said to be about. But one day, when Mrs. Kingdon came to lock up, she found that the cellar-key and door-key, which she had tied in one bunch, and put as she thought in her pocket, were both of them missing.

"Master will be terrible cross," prophesied the cook, who knew her master's particular ways, and how often he would openly blame the imprudence of the mistress with a vehemence which he would afterwards be sure to regret.

The servants were on tenter-hooks, and did their best to prevent a catastrophe by fastening the inner bolts every night as tight as bolt and hasp could fasten. But the lady laughed. The burglars she declared to be a delusion of her husband's. She was rather more extravagant and free-and-easy than usual in his absence, and could not believe her ears when one evening the news was brought to her by her frightened maids that they were certain "as the robbers was a-creepin' into the house." They could hear them, they said, creaking about.

It did not seem to be possible, with the gas flaring brightly, the silver and glass shining on the sideboard, and none of the precautions of darkness and secrecy. The young mistress laughed again at the unnecessary fears, and while the cook took refuge in the cellar, and the housemaid could be heard

shrieking in the kitchen, three men made their way into the dining-room, with blackened faces, and positively took the laughing lady with gentle force by the shoulders, locking her into an adjacent anteroom, through the glass door of which she was allowed to survey them helping themselves to all the family plate. After which they politely led her out of her confinement, and her husband found her merrier than ever over the adventure when he came home that night. It was the final stroke to his domestic unhappiness. Several times already he had asked himself the unpleasant question whether a wife who did not take anything seriously could be a suitable partner for a Christian minister; and when she told him that she knew how to use money a little better than he did, and that he had no business to have entrusted her with such a lot of valuables in the beginning of their married life, if he did not mean to go on with the same plan still, it was a lawyer and not a doctor who was summoned to make amicable arrangements with Mrs. Kingdon's consent for cutting the fetters which her husband had so imprudently forged for himself.

"It was not that I cared for the plate, but that I could no longer bear her continual contempt," he explained to people who afterwards pitied him in his loneliness. "It was better that we should agree to live apart."

"Though if any one can explain to me how they hawful creatures came to get hold o' the missus's keys, I'll eat him," the cook was wont to observe to her intimate friends.

I myself could not lament that the scandal of continual quarrelling should be stopped, nor that the appearance of married affection should no longer be kept up where the reality had ceased to exist. If people who perpetually squabble would oftener be persuaded to live apart, I think we should have less of that paralysing of feeling, of that atrophy which so often in middle-life creeps over the faculty of love, and that disenchantment which casts its shadow over everything.

"I only wish other people were such gentlemen as those burglars," Mrs. Kingdon would say significantly, with a toss of her head. "I assure you it was better than any farce I ever saw—the courtier-like air with which they led me into that little room, and the chivalry with which they furnished me with a chair."

It seemed that the farce was to be kept up. For a little way further off on the other side of Halstead, at a little hamlet called Manor Norton, nestled another more primitive vicarage, whose inmates had such bright faces, that only to look at them was as good as a breeze of the fresh sea air. The parson here

had a wife and three pretty daughters, whose bright, sympathetic glances, and whose musical voices, had quite a recuperative power over me when I was weary with work or vexation. They had little enough of this world's goods, and no plate to be robbed of. Nevertheless, the Graces—as they had been christened by the Halstead people—were notable with their needles, and always managed to look pretty in holland dresses in summer, and cheap serge ones in winter, with skirts and trimmings which were a mass of elaborate embroidery. Insects and flowers, such as Linnæus never saw, but which he might have dreamt of in his wildest dreams, flourished on these dresses in rich abundance.

The back of the cottage piano in the drawing-room, with its profusion of crewel-work and painting, testified to the industry of these damsels' fingers. For the things which were depicted on it were "mystic, wonderful," things which never had been seen on land or sea. I was told that it had something to do with decorative Art, and every time I looked at it, it impressed and awed me.

Thither in due course came the burglars, eating the gingerbread biscuits and other confections which had been left on the table, for these girls were "born cooks," as their mother informed me. The thieves even drank the home-made wine, which was all the vicar could afford. The odour of their tobacco still pervaded the rooms when Ada and Flora came down early the next morning. The girls ran to fetch their croquet sticks to do battle with the burglars directly they heard an ominous creaking of the stairs. But the men had utterly vanished, having literally taken nothing except papa's slippers, and one of the antimacassars embroidered with crewels, of which one of the fellows had had the impertinence to scribble on a sheet of note-paper left on the table, that he intended to keep it as a memento.

It happened that at that time I was amusing myself with some curious speculations about the curative power of faith. I had not much time to trouble myself with abstruse problems of physiology; the hard work I had to do at Halstead kept me too well employed. But, having already tested on more than one occasion the curative force of sham physic, I was much interested in noticing the power of the imagination in other nervous ailments.

The burglars were the means of furnishing me with one or two interesting cases. I had a young fellow under my care who had been sent back from one of the public schools, suffering not only from an overworked brain, but from a supposed

injury to the legs, if not to the spinal cord, declared to be the result of an accident at football.

I could find nothing on examination to account for the supposed injury, but my patient had complained of inability to walk. To force him from the sofa to which a doting mother had confined him, and to see him limp with cries of agony, dragging his limbs across the room, seemed to be nothing less than cruel. I had asked for a consultation, as the case seemed to baffle me, and a surgeon from a neighbouring town had suggested "locomotor ataxy"—a gorgeous term just then invented to keep the public from being too wise. But I could not close with this explanation. That a young fellow just beginning life should be doomed to suffer from a hopeless spinal complaint in consequence of working his brain a little at school, was an hypothesis which I was very unwilling to accept. I felt inclined to fraternise with the burglars, and to rush straightway into print—recording the case in the *Lancet*—when I found that the boy suddeniy recovered the power of walking, and that even his mother could no longer shed tears over him and lament the cruel Providence which had made him a hopeless cripple. I should have been accused of special malignity if I had made him stand upon a heated grating, and caused the sluggish muscles to act after the manner recorded in "Sandford and Merton." But hurrah for the burglars! They sent him dancing in another way.

Again they were too artistic in their craft to enter a house at midnight. It was a perfect triumph of fine art, as in Mrs. Kingdon's experience. Though the drawing-room of the Clintons, who, by-the-bye, were rich people, was as resplendent as usual with gas-chandeliers, and as unbeautiful as many drawing-rooms used to be years ago, with plenty of plate-glass, bright steel, flowery carpets, and endless gilding, yet such display did not deter the thieves from boldly making their entrance. Only the stair-carpets happened to have been taken up, and the housemaid came running down with the alarm that, as she was "a-going to turn down the beds," the imprint of some men's naked feet—"toes and all," as she vividly said—had mudded the stone of the stairs, which in those days used to be whitened, and that the sight of them had "turned her blood all to curds like."

Now the housemaid was a delicate girl. I remember how she startled me when once I had to see her at the request of her mistress, by saying, "I belongs to a family as drops down dead." Clearly Mary Ann, with her fear of heart-complaint, could not be expected to go after the robbers, and, as she

gallantly persisted through her sobs that she was "certain as the men had gone to the bedrooms," and would be robbing the plate-chest containing many valuables, there was not a moment to be lost.

Mr. Clinton gave a heavy sigh and buttoned up his coat as he armed himself with the poker. He repeated the heavy sigh as he sent for the butler to help him, breathing rather hard at the idea of a struggle, at his time of life, with such a creature as a burglar. The butler was a heavy man, and kept respectfully behind the master, but found himself difficult to hide. For, having been ordered to hold a lamp to look into dark corners, he stood in terror of the horrible illuminating power of the petroleum. The terrible luminary would inevitably draw attention to his bulky proportions, and he would be shot "dead as a dormouse," he thought in despair. He breathed, if anything, a little harder than Mr. Clinton, and shaded the light with his hand, as the two men crept like a funeral procession up the stairs.

"Oh, if there was only some one young," thought the mother, as she burst into tears of despair, and looked for sympathy at the lad, who, the last time she had seen him, had had his eyes fixed on the door of the room whence the housemaid had entered, only opening his lips to let fall monosyllables. Wonder of wonders! The sofa was unoccupied. It was not only unoccupied; but her poor crippled boy, Ralph Clinton, had vanished. At the thought of the awful delight of a "jolly tussle" with the thieves, he had felt, as he told me afterwards, a pricking sensation in his feet. How he got to the door before his absence could be noticed by his mother, and even mounted the stairs in advance of the older men, who were creeping like tortoises, he could never afterwards explain. All he knew was that Mary Ann's surmise proved pretty correct. The thieves had been in the best bedroom, where the plate-chest was kept. But they had most unaccountably taken first to the wardrobe, which contained a missionary-box full of pence, not recognising the plate-chest, which was petticoated like an ottoman. At the sound of footsteps they had taken fright, leaving a jemmy behind them, and Ralph Clinton had been just in time to see the tips of the muddy toes, which had struck such anguish in Mary Ann's soul, vanishing by the skylight on the top of the house. Then the boy's brief fit of energy ceased. His strength collapsed, at least for a time, and there was no one to prevent the rogues from climbing down by the water-pipe, and making good their escape into some adjacent empty house.

This was the burglars' first appearance in a street, and I proceeded to take advantage of it. For there was a lady just then under my care to whom I sadly wanted to give a fright. It sounds ungallant, but I was out of patience with the woman, who had done her best to discredit the skill of many of my *confrères* in various parts of England, and who had finally come to make a fool of me at Halstead. I have always had a suspicion of these nomads among patients, who come to you for a week or two, and try to flatter you—as if you were as mean-spirited as a jealous girl—by running down every medical man who has attended them before.

"Excuse me, madam," I generally long to say to such patients, "but you will talk in the same strain about *me* when you go to your next doctor."

And I was no more ready than other men to believe that a pretty, languid-looking woman, well nourished, and of tolerable complexion, who insisted in remaining day after day in bed, could exist, as she wanted me to think, almost on air. I told the husband bluntly that I suspected the maid. I explained that a lot of mischief came through maids, who were so often in collusion in these cases. He, a weak, indulgent sort of fellow, resented my suspicion. The maid he declared to be absolutely blameless, whilst the aggrieved damsel shed tears, protested that her mistress took no form of alcohol, and subsisted on nothing better than a few slices of buttered toast.

I was determined to get to the bottom of the matter, the more so that, having noticed the disappearance of bottle after bottle of eau-de-cologne, and being persuaded that nobody could use them so quickly, I had tackled my patient by asking her suddenly one morning what had become of the new bottle of cologne which I had seen on her dressing-table the afternoon before.

"Oh! Marie"—that was the lady's-maid, with whom I was already at daggers drawn—"Marie had an accident. She spilt it—broke the bottle."

"What, on the table or on the floor?"

"Partly on the table, of course, but I think most of it went on the carpet."

She did not colour as she spoke; she had so accustomed herself to these lies, that, as in other cases of the same kind, her conscience must have become seared.

I looked steadily at the lady.

"If that eau-de-cologne has been spilt on the table," I said, "it must have left a mark on the polish. I know the sort of mark well; nothing is more difficult to get off. Why keep up

this sort of humbug? Why not tell me you have drunk it? And a more mischievous form of poison it would be impossible for you to take."

My patient was in tears. Marie, who had been washing out some lace in the next room, rushed in like a virago, with arms akimbo, from which she was stripping a foam of soap-suds, while the tears washed off something else which I had also suspected from her mistress's interesting get-up.

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II.

THE husband met me the next morning with the air of considering me to be a brute.

"She has not slept all night," he said, a little offensively. "I have never allowed any one to speak to her roughly, and I must entreat you not to do so, though it *may* be the Abernethyan method."

I could see that he would have spoken more strongly if he had ventured.

"I'll have that confounded clock stopped which strikes on the stairs. The lodgings are not *quiet* enough," he added, rather savagely.

My back was thoroughly up. I would have surrendered the case then and there, were it not that for the sake of my own reputation, as well as that of my colleagues, I was more than ever determined to get to the bottom of it.

All is fair in war as well as in love. The landlady of that house knew me well. I had got her through more than one dangerous illness, and she knew that I had the real well-being of my patients at heart.

"Could you not manage," I asked, "to get up just a little alarm?—a cry of thieves, say—or something of the kind, when I am shown up to see Mrs. Bourdillon next time?"

The landlady evidently understood. She had a shrewd insight into things, and I saw that if she had dared she would have told me more about Mrs. Bourdillon.

So the next time when I called, and when my patient was in her most languid attitude, supported by scented pillows, a lace handkerchief in her hand, and a flannel wrapper of a tender rose-colour trimmed also with some creamy and delicate lace; and when I had just been hearing that her appetite was worse than usual, and that all the tonics prescribed for her and the jellies and cream prepared for her delectation had failed, a

scuffle was suddenly heard in the lower part of the house, and a cry was raised of "Thieves, thieves!"

The noise was certainly alarming, much more so than I had intended. For our landlady was the mother of three or four small urchins, whom more than once I had treated to a scramble for pork-pies and apple-turnovers, and she had found it easy to enlist these little rascals in the service, who thought it necessary to kick up a preliminary row.

"Bless my soul!" I cried, in real discomfort as the stentorian din increased. "Who would have thought of thieves, and I the only man in the house!"

Meanwhile, I put my head out of the door, really meaning to call out "Hush, hush!" But the fact that they feared the only man on the premises were going to abandon them, put both the women off their guard.

The French maid went nearly as white—or as sallow—as the yellow lace which, in imitation of her mistress, was goffered round her neck. "Oh! it ish de burglaars!" I heard her say.

And by the time I turned round, Mrs. Bourdillon had jumped up in bed, disarranging the pillows, whilst a black bottle, containing wine or spirit, fell from its hiding-place, and clattered against some tinned chicken and other confections of Crosse and Blackwell's, which, with a plate and knife and fork, had also been concealed beneath the lace-trimmed pillows.

So effectual was the discovery, that I was relieved to be able to make a clean breast of it, and confess to the husband that night that I had found it necessary to meet strategy with strategy.

I think he forgave me. At any rate, he dismissed the French maid, and after a little time took his wife back to London, restored, at least for the time being, to her right mind.

Meanwhile I was as far as ever from satisfying Jenny, seeing that nothing else would please that *exigeante* lady than that I, by some unheard-of exercise of wits, was to discover the burglars and restore peace to the place.

Jenny herself was on the alert. She had always heard that thieves had their eyes on doctors' houses, and there was no persuading her that in the case of people as poorly off as ourselves there would be no occasion for a Dick Turpin to spy out the nakedness of the land. She did not contradict me, but she was of her own opinion still. It came about that one day she was scared and yet triumphant. One of my little boys was poorly, and a bigger schoolfellow was sitting with him in his

bedroom on the top floor of our house. Jenny, who wanted to get through some needlework, was pricking her fingers busily in a room downstairs, with Harry, our second and youngest olive branch, as her companion.

It was a little surprising to have two people shown in on them. A middle-aged lady of somewhat masculine bearing, and a young man with a moustache and a slightly foreign appearance, who said they were strangers in Halstead; that they were mother and son, and had called upon Dr. Meredith to ask him to recommend lodgings, as the lady was to be under his care. Jenny, who was never at a loss, sat cudgelling her brains for the names of lodging-house keepers—these being rare in the village—and at last succeeded in remembering one or two. At the same time, being ever hospitably inclined, she offered wine and cake, which were readily accepted. Yet the visitors stayed on in a wearisome way, till at last the son rose and proposed that he should sally out alone and look at the lodgings, leaving his mother behind him for an indefinite length of time, till he should find accommodation for them both. Meanwhile, as my wife afterwards described to me, a cold shiver began to run in some odd way down her back, as she asked herself the why and the wherefore of all this. The matter became plain to her—it meant *nothing less than burglars*. The supposed son was a burglar—he looked dark and ferocious enough—and the middle-aged lady, with that unfortunate adornment on her lip, was no doubt a man in disguise. So Jenny listened eagerly for the slam of the street door, when the son declared "she had better not ring; he could let himself out," and tried in vain to keep up small talk, while her ears were strained for that sound. It was as she expected—the street door did not slam.

She made an excuse to leave the room, and beckoned Harry in haste.

"He is here, concealed in the house," she said breathlessly to the child. "We must look for him at once."

And, suiting the action to her words, she hurried into my consulting-room, the horror of it seeming to pierce the marrow of her bones, as beneath the hanging tablecloth obtruded a pair of upturned boots, resting with the soles towards her, as if they belonged to a recumbent man.

She dared not raise the table-cloth, or do more than whisper to Harry, "Oh, the wretch!"

But in the nick of time she sent for the big schoolfellow upstairs, who crept down armed with the poker, though his heart within him was as molten wax, while Buttons—as we called the page-boys in those days—was told to "hold for his

life" to the handle of the street door and to shout "Police!" as loud as his lungs would let him, as soon as he saw that the rogue was ready to escape. It would have been a ghastly encounter, especially as Jenny and the cook and housemaid must have helped in the fray, and a couple of schoolboys would have had a sorry chance in the struggle with two experienced burglars. But Jenny, as she afterwards acknowledged, had no time to think of that. She was only remembering how often I had contradicted her fears, and already decided that it would be scarcely ladylike, when I came home, to make much of her triumph. No doubt she thought a special Providence would help her.

On went the solemn procession, armed with pokers, shovels, and frying-pans, with Jenny, like a heroine, heading her subordinates, her heart beating like a sledge-hammer the while—a mixture of consternation and the exultation of being able to tell me, "I knew I was right!" And then—the stealthy raising of the tablecloth—and lo and behold, only *boots!*

I had taken off my wellingtons (as we then called them) that morning, and placed them with my hands under the tablecloth. I suppose it was because I happened never to have put them in that position before, and because those special wellingtons were brand new, that my wife had not been prepared for such a finale.

"Would you have liked it any better if the burglars had broken your head?" I asked that night, when she declared the thing was so humiliating—so utterly ridiculous—she never would have a moment's rest till I discovered those thieves.

In reality I also was just a trifle "riled" at Jenny's discomfiture. These thieves *must* cease to be a nuisance to the neighbourhood. I began to think of everything, and to cram up in my spare moments all the dodges I could get from Dickens and Wilkie Collins. They might furnish me with some hints as an amateur detective. Alas, nearly every clue which would have succeeded in a novel proved useless in real life! The jemmy left at the Clintons' was like any other jemmy. The handwriting on the table at the vicarage of Manor Norton had nothing distinctive about it, though I showed it to all my friends and gave it to the police.

Other people were interested in trying to trace the burglars, especially those whose missing property was not likely to return to them.

Well, one evening I was riding home somewhat leisurely from the moor. Thieves were far away from my thoughts, for the sunset was brilliant. Fantastic bands of crimson and gold

were stretched over the horizon from the clouds above to the waste of waters beneath, and the busiest of men would have been tempted to linger to watch the glowing effect. I was gazing at it, keeping my horse to a slow, measured trot, when I was recalled rather suddenly to sublunary anxieties, being hailed by a young householder, who was much alive to his responsibilities. For, owing to a fatality which I may at some other time relate, Walter Riddell had been suddenly deprived of his father, and left the owner of considerable property and the head of a family, at an age when many young men are still in leading-strings. Fortunately he had servants of proved integrity and fidelity, and he had, as I sometimes told him, an old head on young shoulders.

"Hulloa!" he cried, "doctor, here's a queer sort of lark! Get down from your horse a moment and look at this chalk mark, like an Egyptian hieroglyphic. Martha says it means that the burglars will be here next. Her brother lived coachman where there was just such a mark, and burglars were there a day or two afterwards; she says there's no mistaking it—they're bound to be here in turn."

I put on my spectacles and tried to look wise. In reality I was but catching at a straw. I did not attach much importance to Martha's line of reasoning, and yet I was bound to admit that the chalk mark on Walter Riddell's gate was uncommon. I had never seen anything like it, and could not in the least tell how it got there.

"Come, you disappoint me. I thought you were like Dr. Whewell, and knew pretty well everything, including Chinese music," said my friend. "But I have taken my precautions, and mean to send the kids away. Nurse takes them to-morrow to a cottage down by the sea."

"Is not that a little—ahem—premature?"

"Why, I thought you would understand me," said the wise young fellow; "as if I would expose the kids to the slightest chance of any danger."

"Well," I said, a little abashed, "there is nothing like being on the safe side; and if I can do anything to help you——"

"You're exactly the right man. John and I have hit on a plan, you know. You remember the evening at Manor Norton, and how they took the home-made wine. Now, if we leave a little dessert and port and sherry on the table every night, and if you put some stuff in the wine, just to make them go to sleep, we'll lock the door, and keep the police in readiness. We shall only want you to drug the wine, and we don't want actually to poison them, of course, but just enough to——"

"To make them harmless till you can catch them," I said, brightening at the idea. "But it will never do to leave nothing but that innocent bed of hydrangeas below the windows. We must get the ironmonger to furnish us with a board supplied with threatening steel points—of a tolerable length and strength—as if to keep off cats."

Every precaution was adopted, and Riddell proposed to hide himself in another part of his own domain, as if he, too, were absent, promising to send for me, if Martha's prophecy should be fulfilled.

So little expectation had I of any result, that I thought principally of humouring the lad, and was much surprised when, late one evening, just as I was resting after my work, a messenger came to me in a flurry to tell me to go at once, for Mr. Riddell wanted me. We had decided that not a syllable about it was to be dropped before the Halstead people, but I thought it better to tell Jenny to send at once for the police, in the case of my not returning.

"I wish you had not to play second fiddle. I should have liked *you* to trap them without Walter Riddell planning it," was all that Spartan spouse vouchsafed, as, according to my suggestion, she supplied me with firearms.

But though she made a bravado of being mean as well as brave, she was really neither very courageous nor jealous of Walter. She turned a little pale; the large blue veins became unusually distinct on her white forehead, and the colour faded in her cheeks as she bade me do "nothing risky."

"Your burglars are mere shadows. Remember the *boots*," I answered, with a parting shot, as I set out at once for Walter's house.

I noticed as I drew near, with stealthy footsteps, that my suggestion had been carried out. The beautiful clusters of the hydrangeas hid from all but practised eyes the stiff fence beneath the dining-room windows.

New, strong locks and bolts had been skilfully added to the door of the dining-room, so as not to attract attention. Walter was waiting outside, accompanied by old John. Both had taken off their slippers, and were listening for the sound of snoring; they thought it wise not to make a noise by drawing the bolts till they were convinced that the laudanum had taken effect. I knelt down and drew out a small slip of paper which I had placed in the keyhole, so that I might inspect the room, and then carefully replaced it.

Two of the men were apparently in a drunken sleep. One was on the floor, and another in an arm-chair. Both had

already begun to snore. The third was, unfortunately, in that mood of intense excitement which precedes the soporific state in some constitutions. He was restless, walking about the room, and turning over with his fingers the bright-coloured glasses. Then he took a little more wine. "More opium," as I said to myself, though I was doubtful of its effect.

"Would it be safe to pull the bolt? Would he be sensible enough to be suspicious?" As I asked myself the question I looked warningly at Walter, and for a few moments we scarcely dared to breathe.

But the evening air was cold to those who had been keeping on the watch all day in rooms which had a "stuffy feel" from being partially shut up. And the passage was draughty.

"Atcha—atcha!" went old John—the sneeze was irrepressible.

There was a sudden rush for the door—a rush made with fearful strength. For the moment I thought the imprisoned thief would push his way through. There was a choking sensation in my throat.

"Quick! quick!" I cried to the other men, and we succeeded in pulling the bolts.

Still the door creaked on its hinges. Should I call out to the fellow to surrender—tell him that we were three against one? It was a knotty point to be considered, for John counted for nothing, he was old and shaky; and Riddell was a mere stripling, while the man's strength, naturally great, was enhanced by desperation.

After a little while the efforts grew weaker and weaker. The man left the door. We heard him making an attempt to wake his companions. Then he evidently tried the window.

"If he should jump down and impale himself," the young master of the house whispered hoarsely to me. He had taken in the horror of the possible situation.

"He is a great deal too sharp. The opium seems only to have sharpened his faculties. The moon has risen now, and he will plainly see the spikes," I answered reassuringly.

There was no help as yet. Could Jenny have forgotten? It was not like her to put off communicating with the police.

There was no intermitting the night's watch, and some of us were so afraid that a desperate attempt might be made to scale the window, at the risk of fearful bodily injury, that a tarpaulin was spread over the dewy grass—a sort of improvised waterproof bed—on which Walter Riddell insisted on lying down.

When half the night had passed, there were fresh noises in

the room. The other men began to stir ; probably the effect of the narcotic was passing off.

At the same moment we heard other voices outside. "Be keerful with that lantern."

Another servant of Riddell's was guiding the tardy policemen.

"I'm not the man to stay away when there's a job of this sort on," we heard him say, in boastful voice. "It seems a burnin' shame to leave the young master, but I were told naught about it."

The policemen—having found that we had done their work —were quick enough to step with importance into our shoes.

"Be quick—here—hush! wasn't that a noise?"

For indeed there were unearthly noises proceeding from the room—sounds of cursing and swearing—of threats which made one's blood run cold.

"Doctor, you may be wanted. Tek care of yerself," said some one grimly to me.

"Don't let him get the first shot."

"Right, lads, steady."

The door was suddenly thrown open, but it was evident, as I supposed, that the opium had only given fictitious strength to one of the culprits. I thought of De Quincey pacing the streets all night with his brain more on the alert owing to the influence of the noxious drug. Two of the culprits were easily handcuffed ; the other—a mere boy—was discovered dangerously fast asleep. But the remaining rogue, probably the leader of the gang, wrestled with the constable who first entered the room, so that the two fell together, holding each other tightly. But the burglar was the stronger. He was armed simply with a knife, and, when we saw that he struck at the constable to make him loose him, one of us threatened to shoot him down.

"Will you go with us quietly? If you do not, it will be worse for you," I shouted at the top of my voice.

"No ; he shall either kill me or I will kill him."

The answer was merely to gain time ; for in another moment the burglar had slipped like an eel from the weaker grasp of the policeman, knocking the staff out of his assailant's hand, and rushing for the door so as to knock over Walter Riddell—possibly with intention—partially stunning him.

Perhaps I ought to have tried to shoot the ruffian, but I felt for him ; he was so like a hunted deer.

It was now early in the morning, but the news had spread like wildfire through the neighbourhood. I was half angry with the Halstead people, as heads suddenly appeared at every window, and half-dressed figures at every corner of our principal

street. Old men, young men, and even girls! They seemed to be quite a crowd of people for our small place; yet they congregated in an instant, as they might have done in a larger town—all to see one fellow-creature hounded down, and run, as it were, to earth. I felt as if we must allow him to have his chance, so a hot chase soon commenced, which lasted for more than an hour. All the blackguards and drunken rascals for miles round our little hamlet seemed to get scent of the chase, and joined in the cry. They were close on the burglar's heels, as he doubled and turned, scaling hedges and leaping ditches, for field after field, pursued by a pack of men and boys. So exciting did the race become, that I found myself almost wishing that the rogue might baffle the pursuers, when a few, more astute than the rest, took a short cut by a cross road, waiting for a moment when the hunted wretch would be bound to emerge by a path across a wood. Then he, suspicious of the trap, made for the main road, darted across the little railway line, and finally took refuge in a cottage, where the good woman, unlike Jael, did her best to hide him, and only gave him up at the demand of a couple of constables.

# THE GHOST OF SIMON SHAW

## I.

THERE is an ancient saying that it is as easy to raise the dead as to teach an old man. In other words, to "put a new mind into an old man, and convince him that all his life long he has been a blundering ass, is about as impossible as the performance of a miracle."

Now of all the cantankerous, pig-headed old fellows in the parish of Halstead, Simon Shaw was about the worst. It was of no use to argue with him. If he did not answer like Dr. Johnson, "You may have your reason, sir, for saying two and two make five, but they make four all the same," he would stamp with his foot, and reiterate his assertions, with more illiterate and therefore more annoying persistence. He seemed to be old when I first met him, though he must have been in the prime of his life. His face was already wrinkled like a winter apple; and the premature tell-tale lines gave him a look of cunning about the eyes. The mouth was so thin in its outlines that it soon began to assume the shape of the puckered opening of a lady's bag; while the shoulders were stooping and the chest concave.

Simon was one of those meagre creatures who yield Dame Nature little interest on her investments. There was no man in Halstead who more deliberately outraged all those rules and precautions which folks in modern times call "laws of health;" yet he seemed determined to put science at a disadvantage by attaining a longevity to which he had no right, and which could be considered as little less than impertinence on his part.

His wife was almost as dried-up and wizened as himself, and,

when I first knew them, they were both in their small way persistent money-grubbers.

It was seldom that Jenny took a dislike to any man, but I must confess that she had an aversion for Simon Shaw.

"That dreadful old man!" she called him, soon after our marriage, "so wedded to his own ideas and his own ways; he *is* hopelessly crabbed."

And yet, at that time, Simon Shaw was not old. His hair was still iron-gray, and the same coloured stubble on his chin imparted a bluish shade to the lower part of his face—which was supported, according to the fashion of those days, by a stiff black stock.

I knew nothing to match this stock in ugliness, unless it were his "guid wife's" auburn front, adorned as far as the nape of her neck by a stiff erection of black lace.

The couple were said to half-starve their servants. One of their maids had come complaining to me.

"They eats up everything on their platters for fear o' wasting of it—a reg'lar Jack Sprat and Mrs. Sprat—that's what I call 'em." And, as I had prescribed a generous diet for the girl, she soon found it necessary to leave these "skin-flints," as she pertly nicknamed them. Well, you must understand we were not so clever in those days as people pretend to be now. We had not got to spinning theories, and blowing bubbles, or to making caustic comments on hereditary taints. "Heredity"—that is a word you have coined but lately! It helps a man's conscience when he wants to slip on one side; it is comparatively simple to see a blind beggar afflicted for the sins of his parents without listening to his cries. It is so easy to chop logic about the right or the wrong of a man's actions being entailed on successive generations, and the mischief of interfering with the legitimate order of things. But in those days we swallowed down all sorts of queer exceptions to the rule with the most unscientific carelessness. And yet we were somewhat startled at the impish freak which Nature played in sending this unpopular couple the most winsome of daughters.

The people at Halstead were as a rule rich in children and poor in money. Simon Shaw and his wife were said to be rich in money, and they had but one child, and that a girl, to whom to leave their wealth. Theoretically she ought to have been sallow, with a parchment-like skin, and a strident voice which would make one wince. But instead of that she grew up from one of the loveliest of toddling children to an oval-faced, blue-eyed maiden, with a voice fresh as that of a young mavis. The parents were penurious, the daughter had a mania for giving;

the parents were seldom seen to smile, the daughter was brimming over with fun. The parents were vulgar, not on account of their poverty, but from a low state of moral feeling which never aspired to anything nobler. The daughter had that innate refinement of feeling which showed itself in her bearing, and made every man take off his hat to her. As if the men anticipated the time when the word lady may become like the Italian "Donna," and may be used as a mark of respect for every woman! The mother died when Mysie was in her teens, and from that time we often wondered how the girl and her father managed to live together in a tranquillity which left little for the neighbours to gossip about. Simon's yoke was an iron one. Joyless himself, he did his best to sober his daughter's joy.

Never were there two natures more utterly unlike. Mysie was a lover of sea and sky—a dreamer of dreams. The beauty "born of murmuring sound" seemed to have passed into her face. But old Simon hated all sentiment. He was one of those methodical and punctual people who sternly correct all dawdling enjoyment. Mysie was not allowed to read or think. She was even grudged the time which she loved to spend at church, listening to the choristers' voices, or to the voice of the clergyman, sonorous and grand, as it sounded to her, rolling out periods which she could not be said to comprehend. For the girl had received little or no education. And though it seemed to us—possibly in our ignorance—a topsy-turvy sort of providential arrangement which had entrusted such a child to the upbringing of such a father, she submitted with the utmost amiability to all discomfort in her present surroundings. No doubt there was a halo of illuminated mist, as there is to all young things, over the future—the unknown.

For Mysie was already beloved by a sailor lad, who had been her playmate from childhood, and had been attracted to a seafaring life by the tales which fascinate so many eager boys. So long as she could comfort herself by the thought that in a few short years Stephen would be able to claim her, it was nothing to her to be scolded for a waste of time even over meals, to be obliged to fag in as much fatigue and discomfort as the lowest of her father's drudges, grudged the time for desultory talk, for amusement, or even for laughter.

But alas for her! Simon about this time made a profitable investment in some mines which had been long abandoned, but which, on being worked again, yielded an unexpected amount of interest to the shareholders. His ambition suddenly woke not only for himself but for his daughter. It was not that he really cared for her, but that he began to look upon her

as something in which his own glory might be reflected. Mysie was to be no longer meanly dressed ; her father had suddenly discovered the fact that she had an appearance and demeanour above the common. Her acquaintance with Stephen was spoken of with scorn, and she was given to understand that if she married the lad, not only would she not inherit a farthing of her father's property, but her father's curse would be on her head, and ruin and even shame would be the consequence.

Never shall I forget the self-possession and strength of character shown by the untaught maid as she sought my wife's help for the first time after a stormy interview with her father. There was an expression in her face which struck to our hearts as she came in, still with that erect gait for which she had been always remarkable, cheerful and with a forced smile, but with a striking contrast even in that smile to the mirth and spontaneous merriment of past days.

Stephen had just then returned from his first voyage. He had been fortunate in obtaining an opportunity for displaying courage and promptitude during a storm at sea, and his conduct had been mentioned with approbation. He was perhaps a little sanguine in his hope of obtaining some promotion speedily. To see Stephen a lieutenant had been the height of Mysie's modest ambition. To be as happy and respected as she was already gentle, innocent, and refined, and to be the wife of a man who loved her truly and well, was the whole of her programme for her life. But to marry another for whom she did not care was to be degraded in her own eyes, to cease even to be respectable ; rather, as she told us, would she choose to die.

For it required but little questioning to elicit from her the fact that her father intended to force her to marry another who had long admired her, and who was tempted by the promise of wealth to make her his wife. It seemed strange at first sight that a man whose own vision was so fatally coloured by the duplicity natural to himself should have seen no cause for suspicion in the conduct of a young cavalry officer, the younger son of a noble family who, possessing all the vices and few of the virtues of his profession, proposed to clear off his debts and continue a career of profligacy by marrying a young and lovely woman, rich, and lower than himself in rank.

The very mention of Captain Stewart, who was known in the neighbourhood as a man of little or no principle, made Jenny so indignant that I soon began to fear that I should be expected to adopt some such rôle as that of Friar Laurence in *Romeo and Juliet.*

"No," I said, "I must be firm; I cannot stir in this matter. Apart from the mere pleasure of 'doing good,' as you call it, by trying to save life and mitigate pain and suffering, we medical men have dangers enough to encounter in having sworn allegiance like soldiers to the flag of science. We are not called upon to go out of our beat. There is wearisome toil enough for body and mind, without entangling ourselves in other people's squabbles. I am sorry enough for the girl, but I cannot help her."

I felt that I had been talking too much like a book, and that my wife might justly have been a little irritated. But the sly little woman knew how to get on my weak side: nowhere, she told me, had the true spirit of Christianity been more conspicuous than among the members of my profession. Not only, according to her, did we recognise the true importance of our short span of human life, but our devotion to the cause of humanity was more noble still; for it often fell to our lot to lift up the fallen and help those in miserable entanglements such as this.

But even after this eulogium I did not see that any intervention could be called for on my part. I suggested that Mysie should be sent back to her father, and told firmly to hold her own. I afterwards heard that she did so for a time, though the ordeal was a terrible one. Every accidental word or allusion to her resolution in the matter of the marriage would waken a storm of rage on the part of her father.

"You tell me to be silent," she said, on one occasion. "Very well, I will not speak, but you cannot force me to marry. At least, I can remain as I am."

At this his curses broke out afresh.

The girl began to look ill and thin. The roses faded from her cheeks; her eyes were hollow, with dark circles under them. I had not been called since Mrs. Shaw's somewhat sudden death to Simon Shaw's house, those being days in which small ailments were allowed to run their course. Life had not been made — as it sometimes is now — scarcely worth living by innumerable small precautions for the preservation of health.

Simon Shaw's house was darkened by a long avenue of trees, and surrounded on one side by a row of fishermen's huts, often smelling of stale fish, and used for the storage of nets. On the other was a rough common which separated it from the shingle—a marshy common with a small lake and woods on one side, and intersected by a low dyke which drained into the old harbour, where the river, broadening slightly, ran into the sea. Picturesque enough was this harbour, with its fishing-boats, and

groups of net houses. But, though no one in the present day would think of taking lodgings near it without inquiring heedfully into its sanitary arrangements, we were then contented with our low death-rate, and did not concern ourselves much about sanitary deficiencies. It is likely enough that, though Simon prided himself on his stone gateway, and his oak-panelled rooms, the air of his old house may have been laden with germs, the earth of his garden may have exuded poison, and the very silver and gold which he had handled so much, and had so carefully hidden away, may have contained the seeds of zymotic diseases. But, fortunately for our peace, we did not trouble ourselves much then about these terrible risks. When I was sent for to attend Mysie, I did not analyse the milk, or investigate the dust-heap. I discovered sufficient cause for her emaciation in the persecution she had undergone. Encouraged by the compliments which my wife had paid me in telling me how often a skilful word of mine had been successful in calming angry blood, allaying bad feeling, and settling quarrels amongst our neighbours, I essayed a few words with Simon as to his treatment of his child.

It was worse than useless, and my medical attendance I soon saw would be useless likewise. The girl's heart-strings were hourly torn by the unnatural conflict which was taking place. She would obey her father in every reasonable thing, but she could not give up the lover to whom her promise had been given, and to whom her soul was knit. She shrank from Captain Stewart with a loathing which hourly increased. Her smiles had been given to Stephen Blair, and she could not transfer them to another of whom she disapproved. No fear of poverty benumbed her feelings, no power of forgetfulness was in her nature. I still determined not to interfere. If the two were willing to be married, and to take the risk of their own determination, it did not seem to me that any one had a right to forbid them.

Thus it came about that on a summer morning when Mysie Shaw and Stephen Blair were privately married, with the preliminaries already arranged beforehand at a church in our neighbourhood, more than one member of our household was present at the wedding, and my wife took upon herself to see that all was right about the parish register.

## II.

THE roses were already returning to Mysie's cheeks, and, though she had to put her white ribbons aside and return to her father's house as if nothing had happened, there was a smile of contentment on her sweet face which was pleasant to look at.

She had counted the cost, and I had no fear of the result. For there was a firmness in her nature which she seemed to have inherited from her father.

"It all seems so easy now," as she said to me, "that I cannot help wondering at my former fears. At the worst, my father can only cut me off without a penny, and Stephen cares as little about the money as I do."

"When the proper time comes, I will tell him, as I promised you," I answered, strengthened in my conviction that it was a sort of duty to protect her.

She went again about her errands with dancing feet, and again her clear voice could be heard joining in the music at the church.

But not so the bridegroom. Stephen Blair was unaccountably depressed. The hopes which he had cherished so long, and which had so happily been realised—the heart's desire which had been granted—could not allay his melancholy. He was certainly on the eve of another voyage which would part him from his wife. But as he could see little enough of her even if he dawdled away his time at Halstead, and as the sailor is generally supposed to be a joyous being on whose strong shoulders care rests lightly, this depression of spirits was difficult to understand.

"Doctor, do you believe in presentiments?" he said to me one day. "It's not only that I am beginning to be sick of the life—it's a slave's life to be spent in imprisonment away from all that one cares about—I've no right to grumble at that. I chose it, and I must stick to it. I'm ready to be a submissive drudge, and glad to brave dangers as I did before, if only I could think I might return as other men just to see I've got a home, just to take a peep once more at my wife's face. But it's not to be—not to be. I shall part from her and never see her again."

"Stuff and nonsense," I said, laughing; "you ought to be superior to such humbug. A fellow like you to talk about presentiments. You sailors are a superstitious lot."

"That's true for you," he said, as a convulsive movement

which he in vain endeavoured to repress shook his broad shoulders, and he gave a hopeless stare at the sky. "What would you say, doctor, if I was to tell you that, as I went by the churchyard the other night, when it was a bit misty, I saw—as plain as I see you—the figure of a woman rising like from the mist, taking a sort of shape, till I could see the features as plain as daylight, and the bit of a child which she held, bundle-wise, clasped to her breast. I was just going to meet her, and to ask her with my own lips how she came to be out there all alone in the misty cold, and where she got the little one from, till she looked at me with a strange look, and then melted right away among the gravestones—it was Mysie and not Mysie—and an ill omen for me."

"No omen at all, but a trick played on you by your own senses. I should say the mist had a lot to do with it," I answered, with a laugh.

"You don't know; it was real enough, just as real as I see you. Why, I tripped myself up among the tombs in my haste to search for it," said the man, shaking his head.

"Why, my good fellow, have you never heard of optical delusions? Such stories as you tell are only fit for babes and nursemaids. I believe about as much in your apparition as I believe in the great sea-serpent," I answered, clapping him on the shoulder.

It was of no use. Nothing could restore the man's common-sense, and I began to think that, though he was not deficient in solid worth, there was a weakness about his intellect which made him the inferior of Mysie. The latter bore the parting with characteristic bravery. Whatever misgivings she might have experienced, whatever sinking of the spirits or sickening of the heart, she hid from the notice of others, and occupied herself busily with domestic duties. However unkind her father might have been to her, she cherished no remembrance of his unkindness. All might have gone merrily, but for a suspicion on the part of old Simon that there must be something to account for his daughter's cheerfulness. He plied her with questions which were difficult to answer, and told her to prepare herself for her approaching marriage with Captain Stewart.

"That can never take place," said Mysie, with a self-possession which alarmed, if it did not intimidate him. "I would have sacrificed myself to you in anything else, but I could not do a wrong thing that good might come of it."

"Don't be absurd," thundered Simon. "Nobody wants you to make a victim of yourself. Your head is full of all sorts of rubbishing romance."

His blind anger only increased when he found that she had ceased to care for it. For the first time he attempted personal violence, seizing her by the arm, and flinging her towards the door. She, extraordinary as it seemed to him, had not a tear or a lament, and only proved to him the uselessness of his rage, by looking at him with pity and compassion.

It seemed to be necessary to adopt other tactics, if the old man were to succeed in his object. To do him justice, he suspected nothing more than that his daughter had formed a secret engagement with the absent sailor.

But one morning when Mysie was busied as usual with her household affairs, a strange woman was shown in upon her, whose appearance took her by surprise. For the intruder was not only dark and of somewhat masculine appearance, but her voice and manner were insolent, and, after staring at Mysie for some moments without uttering a word, she began, in an offensive way :

"My name is Jane Blair—you have probably heard of me—unless, indeed, Stephen Blair deceived you as miserably as he misled me. When he engaged himself to you, did he tell you that he had a wife living, one whom he had married in foreign parts, and whom he had tried in cruelty to cast off?"

Mysie stood looking at her with wide-open, innocent eyes.

"You are telling me a wicked lie," she panted at last ; for her voice had failed with her gasping breath, and she could only utter a whispering sound between her chattering teeth.

"It's no lie, but as true as the skies above ye. You may thank Heaven that your name has not been dishonoured, and you are saved from ruin in time," cried the other insultingly.

No one knew what else passed between the two. The servants only heard their mistress say, "Begone!" as they rushed to the spot, terrified by the sharp, raised tones so unusual in the voice, which she had recovered in her indignation. Mysie stood drawn to her full height, sinking down directly afterwards in merciful unconsciousness, shrinking from their touch when they came to help her, and shaking from head to foot with shivering sighs.

"It is not true, it is not true," was all they heard her say. But she was delirious that night. "Out of my sight, you base accuser—don't come and tell your wicked lies to me."

Soon afterwards I was sent for, at the urgent cry of peril and agony. Mysie was naturally a brave woman, and not one of the type of Constance, who could urge on behalf of the weaknesses of her sex, "I am sick, and capable of fears. I am full of fears, subject to fears ; I am a woman, and therefore naturally born to

fears." Apprehension and timidity, with a tendency to conjure up artificial griefs, had ever been unknown to Mysie. But her courage, with her confidence, had suddenly deserted her. Her heart had chafed sorely against its fate, and she had no longer any desire to face a life in which from her childhood upwards she had been checked, disparaged, over-mastered, misunderstood, and in which the fates had seemed to be against her whenever she had tried to help herself. Her mind was still somewhat bewildered, her utterances rapid and confused, when, after long hours of suffering, we placed the little baby in her arms—a puling, weakly thing, born prematurely into a world where it was destined to meet with the roughest greeting. She smiled at it, and had sense enough to press it eagerly to her bosom, though she was even then passing through the valley of the shadow. She held out her hand to me, endeavouring to articulate. I bent down my ear to her, and thought I could distinguish a few words of a familiar hymn she had often sung in the village choir—the murmur of a sacred name—and then —the silver cord was loosed. She gave me one long look, with eyes singularly bright, as if she saw sights which I could not see. Then the same bright eyes seemed eagerly to search the room as if for some beloved object. She distinctly said "Stephen!" and then the eyes became sightless. The spirit had gone to God who gave it, and only its deserted husk lay before us.

I stood by the bedside, looking at the beautiful face which still smiled as if in possession of some wonderful secret which we on earth might not know, and then I closed the eyes as tenderly and carefully as if Mysie had been my own child. For the old servant, who had acted as nurse, was sobbing so helplessly as to be quite useless. I had given orders that no one else was to disturb us, that Simon Shaw was simply to be told that his daughter was dangerously ill, and was to be kept at all risks from the room.

I had not counted on the fact that he would probably be listening, and that the child's plaintive wail must have resounded through the house.

The daybreak was already sweeping down over the bed, and I still stood like an idiot holding the lighted candle, and scarcely able to realise what had taken place, when the door slowly opened and the spectre of Simon Shaw shuffled up to the bed—so much more did he even then resemble a ghost than a living man.

I think he had meant to curse her, so entirely was his expression that of despair and determination, but the sight of

that beautiful smiling face, with its secret sealed, as it were, between its lips, disarmed him, hard though he was.

"The devil——" he began, and then stared straight in front of him with a ghastly stare.

I knew it was my turn to speak, for I too was resolved and miserable.

"Fear not, Simon Shaw," I said, "to look on the face of your child. For she was guileless and innocent, and her infant was born in lawful wedlock. It was the cruelty of your hard and selfish heart which forced her to keep silence. Yet life was sweet to her, and I tell you she has been done to death. The impostor who intruded on her with the lie that she was no lawful wife would surely have a heart wrung with remorse if he could look at her now—cold and breathless—she who was naturally a healthy woman. I should like to tell the man who was guilty of planning that deed that at the judgment day he will have to answer for it as surely before his Maker as if he paid the penalty of the law for murder."

If I had wished to disarm Simon, I had accomplished my object.

He took refuge, as I had expected he would, in unrepentant scoffs, and he refused to have anything to do with his grandchild. But on the other hand he no longer assailed the reputation of his daughter. After a little while his constitutional greed asserted itself as usual. The love of amassing money, though he had now no one to leave it to, became more than ever the one object of existence to the miserable creature.

Captain Stewart left the neighbourhood, and a maiden lady who lived at a little distance, in spite of her limited income, took charge of Mysie's child.

The unfortunate part of the matter was that we never heard again of Stephen Blair. Nearly twenty years had elapsed before the news reached me that the poor fellow had died of yellow fever, and that the letters I wrote to him never could have reached him. One or two were returned to me, but the postal communications in those days were by no means perfect.

This uncertainty about her mother's history threw an unexpected cloud over little Mary's life. As she grew up, it was impossible not to be struck by her wonderful likeness, both in person and character, to the Mysie who had once been a favourite with Halstead people. But these people now never mentioned Mysie. Dead though she was, and there is always a feeling of merciful kindness to the dead, it yet came to be understood that her reputation could not be cleared. Various theories were invented to account for the sudden appearance and dis-

appearance of the stranger who claimed to be Stephen Blair's true wife, and whose visit had been, humanly speaking, the cause of Mysie's death. But all scandalous gossip naturally veers to the darker and more uncharitable side. And it was grievous to Jenny and myself to find that, as years went on, it was generally supposed that Stephen Blair had probably married during his absence on his earliest voyage. On inquiry it was found that the ship's crew had remained for some time at more than one foreign port, and Stephen's continued silence was readily taken as an acknowledgment of his guilt.

It is almost impossible for those who have not lived long to realise the contumely and want of sympathy to which children, branded with illegitimacy, used once to be subjected. A better understanding of the true spirit of that Christianity which has leavened all phases of modern society, refining the conduct and feeling even of those who reject the truth of the revelation, has convinced us that the higher morality does not need to be protected by hard-heartedness and pride. But thirty years ago a girl who bore the maiden name of her mother, simple and winning though she might be, was subjected in a village community to much hardship and scorn. The good lady who had taken little Mary under her protection was even openly blamed. She was said to be weakly indulgent, as well as foolish, in taking the girl to educate, inasmuch as she had never prepared her by telling her of that which might be considered by other people as her inherited burden of shame.

"I have not the heart to do it," was her invariable answer; "let her retain her innocent simplicity as long as she can."

"But innocence is not necessarily ignorance, and it would be cruel for this blow to be dealt to her by some unfeeling hand," I had remonstrated more than once, when Mary's intelligence was sufficiently matured and she began to ask awkward questions.

The old lady pleaded, not without reason, her own sensitive organisation and the difficulty of exposing herself in delicate health to unnecessary agitation. And when at last I had to announce to her her own approaching end, I was taken by surprise at her requesting "one favour"—that "my wife would tell little Mary the story of her birth."

It often falls to the lot of unselfish people to have to perform disagreeable tasks, and I thought it was rather hard on Jenny. But she had so much courage about things which would often have troubled ordinary mortals, that she only answered she thought Miss Newcombe had done more than her own share of the good work as it was, and it was but right other people

should help her a little. Jenny often did not consult me at all about her manner of doing things, but had generally a plan of her own rather different from other people's.

It was on a day when the flowers were blooming and birds singing that she called for little Mary and took her for a pleasant country walk, guiding her steps so that they returned by the village churchyard, where, in an unfrequented spot beneath the shadow of willow-trees, a simple stone was inscribed with the name of "Mysie—aged 19." There Jenny bade her spread her flowers, and, taking the child's hand in hers, endeavoured to prepare her for the future by telling her the history of her mother.

"Never let any one speak against her," she said, "for she was kind and good, healthy-minded and natural, and one of the purest creatures whom I ever met with in this world. It is possible that, when Miss Newcombe is taken from you, you may have a little to bear, as she had before you. But be strong, my child, as your mother was strong. Hold up your head with the bravest, and always remember that there are few people in the world who have so little occasion to be ashamed of their parentage as you have of yours."

If the little one shed a few tears, they were dried as soon as shed. My wife's confidence seemed to be contagious, her courage reassuring. From that day the child cherished the memory of her mother, and came home calm and assured, ready for the battle of her life.

People spoke of Miss Newcombe as an amiable philanthropist, to be excused on the score of her age for making a mistake, and were even strengthened in their ill opinion because Simon Shaw took no notice of his grandchild. He was living an outwardly respectable life, with his workpeople cowering in an abject way before him, while he was cherishing cruel and revengeful thoughts in an uncontrite heart. The excuse of his grandchild's supposed illegitimacy was used as a miserable subterfuge to extenuate his own cruelty,

Once I ventured to interfere with him, and to reason with him as to the wickedness of his conduct. But he bade me, in his usual cultivated language, to go to an unmentionable place, and to his dependents made me out to be a downright scamp.

That was rather too much for my wife's equanimity. She was as excited as if she were a girl again for the moment when she heard of how my dignity, as she called it, had been outraged. She wanted to insist on my promising that I would never again speak to old Simon on the subject which irritated him, though it amused me to find that *she* could not keep from

talking about him, and felt a solicitous wonder about his affairs, as well as his grand-daughter's, which could not be called exactly curiosity. It savoured too much of pity.

For, as the time went on, it would have been difficult to say which of the two was most to be pitied. Mary was left somewhat desolate, when Miss Newcombe, full of years, was gathered to her fathers. The old lady had found it impossible to make any provision for her *protégée*. Indeed, she herself had long been maintained by a sort of annuity supplied by her relations. This of course ceased on her death. But the girl was bright and helpful as her mother had been before her, and had been brought up to shift for herself. She would not be "beholden," as she expressed it, to any of the people who had looked down on her mother. But she was quick at accounts, and wrote a clear handwriting, besides being trained in domestic ways, so that it was comparatively easy to find her a situation as a sort of general helper to the wife of a gentleman farmer who knew her history, and admired her independence of character.

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III.

In one matter only did Mary show a little feminine weakness. Blood, as they say, is thicker than water, and, incredible as it may seem, she hankered a little—not after her grandfather's money-bags, but after the old man himself, who had done his best to injure her. Once, indeed, she had gone so far as to dress herself in disguise and take a peep at the family mansion, with the tiles beside the fireplace from which her mother had learned the Bible history, the family clock, and all the other articles on which Mysie's eyes had rested. On this occasion it was remarkable that Mary expressed no horror of old Simon, whose eyeballs were now sunken in deep cavities, and whose voice had become lowered to a querulous quaver. She only remarked "that he was so very old, and had no one to care for him," as she cast commiserating glances at his miserable apparel, his withered and haggard cheeks, and even the forced smile which for years had seemed "to lodge a frozen sorrow." His wealth had steadily increased, and with it his miserly habits. It was even doubted if he allowed himself sufficient food to support his body, though every one agreed that the old man, who was nearly eighty, seldom or never ailed. And I had my own private opinion that, as the majority of people take more food and drink than is good for them, Simon

had probably kept in abeyance the seeds of those diseases which attack most men before they have a chance to become octogenarians, by his abstemious preference for water, and his fancy on the score of economy for a vegetarian diet.

Anyhow, his age was singularly unblessed, and most men would have regarded death as a far less calamity than the dragging out of a miserable existence unloved and unhonoured, if not untended. He was quite aware that the vultures were already gathering round him, and was more shy than ever of welcoming them to his house, since he knew that they were looking out for what he could leave them.

"Ah, I understand now why my grandfather lives in such obscurity! What a pity he has all that money—what good can it do him?" said Mary, after her stolen visit. "I wish he could only get rid of it—'tis a tiresome encumbrance to him, no doubt of that."

I looked at her, to see if she was speaking with her usual sincerity. No one could doubt it who saw the curves of decision round her prettily-modelled mouth. Mary was a warm-hearted and brave-spirited girl, with even less sensitiveness and more fortitude than her mother, but I doubt if she ever thought, as *we* did, of the ultimate destination of her grandfather's money. That he should have carved with his own hand such a miserable future for himself, and should be so utterly alone in his old age, because he had never thought of *giving*, seemed to touch her with pity, but she had no fears for herself.

"I cannot be dishonoured," as she said to my wife one day, "when I have done nothing wrong."

She wore no rich and rare gems like the heroine of Moore's song, but she walked about as fearlessly, unconscious of other adornments. It was, indeed, in our eyes, one of her greatest recommendations that she was quite unaware of her own physical attractiveness, and would have scouted the idea of being more winning than other girls.

Meanwhile, it was generally said that a man-servant of the old miser's was more likely than any one else to come in for the gold which had been accumulated. Tom Barton had married a wife who knew how to wheedle old Simon, and who, since his master's feebleness had increased, had taken upon herself the sole charge of the lonely man. The Halstead people even said that, when Tom Barton had been in his cups, he had boasted that he and his wife had got the old man to make a will, in which he had signed over all his property to him.

"If anything of the kind has taken place, you may depend upon it there is some devilry in it," said one of my friends, to

whom I mentioned this piece of gossip. "Men of Simon Shaw's miserly habits can seldom be got to make a will, unless they are forced to do so by intimidation."

After this, I made inquiries, having Mary's interests in view. And certainly, as one of the Halstead men remarked to me, "it looked a little fishy" that old Simon, whose temper was known to be "that awful," should be as "mild as milk" in the presence of his quondam man-servant.

It tantalised me, but I could do nothing. After all, I was inclined to think that there was a curse upon this gold, as my wife had boldly said. And yet I was conscious of an instinct which always made me revolt, when I saw the mean and despicable thus triumphant, and usurping for themselves the pleasant things which belong to the self-sacrificing and the good. I always chafed when I rode past old Simon's house. It was some time before I could learn to pass it with philosophic composure.

He had parted with me on such ill terms that I never expected he would send for me, nor do I suppose he would have done so, had not the urgency been great. In fact, I was roused by the night-bell from my early-morning sleep, and having found, as I grew older, that want of rest was apt to tell on me, I rose somewhat grumblingly to obey the summons. It was, however, on a lovely July morning, when the whole universe seemed to be teeming with life—with no gaps or crevices, no unfinished spaces which nature with its overflowing abundance did not fill. I felt, as I had sometimes done before, a strange emotion in contrasting this fulness of creation with the mental vacancy of the sleeping village. The labourers were not as yet in the fields. But as I crossed the marsh near the pond, making a short cut from my own house to Simon's, I startled a large heron, making him fly off with his legs hanging down. It was picturesque to see him lazily flapping his wings, then tucking up his trailing legs as he disappeared in the distance. The lark was already high in the sky, chanting its matins before others were awake, and as I neared the shingle with its wonder of sea-weed, from which the translucent water in tidal ebb had receded, it was pleasant enough to notice the feathery anemones, such as people now keep in their aquariums. They seemed to be in full flower, as it were, brown, lilac, and red, among the pools between the boulders, with a consciousness of having no one to make them shy. It would have been a paradise in which to linger, if a poor doctor had ever time to be in a mystical mood.

But old Simon, as they thought, was dying; they had sent

for me, supposing he had an apoplectic seizure. And—much as from past experience I was inclined to shrink from this truncated specimen of humanity shorn in its old age of all its flowers, and even of some of its leaves—a sick man was to me a sick man. Whether I liked him or not had nothing to do with the matter, I was bound to hasten on, striding over the pools of water, and scrambling past the banks of shingle till I reached the avenue which led to Simon's house.

His consciousness was already returning. I remained with him for some hours, but his faculties were still benumbed. Yet as I leant over him, scanning his slightly-drawn face, I fancied I heard him articulate with some difficulty, and thoughts evidently far away.

"Tell her I forgive her. Tell her I did not mean it. I found it impossible to stick to my curses."

"Perhaps it is too late to forgive," I purposely answered.

For I knew that the time was short, and we two were alone. I had promptly dismissed Tom Barton and his wife in different directions in search of various remedies.

"*Too late!*" he echoed, with a hollow voice, still speaking in a slow, emphatic way in his new difficulty of utterance, but with a concentration of energy which almost startled me. "Doctor, do you think we shall live again after this?"

It was difficult to distinguish the words used in his muffled speech, but I shall never forget the ghastly expression of the face, nor the stare of the sunken eyeballs—strained to the uttermost, as if all the man's faculties were tense with the horror of a possible leap into darkness.

His question took me by surprise. I did not know that his intellect was so unclouded, nor that he had recognised me, till that moment. But I had no difficulty in answering it.

I answered briefly, but solemnly:

"I *do*. I pity those who doubt it."

For, the more I became acquainted with the discoveries of that science which had made such rapid strides in my time, the more certainly had I become convinced of the reality of perennial existence.

The man showed no pleasure. He had no memories "benignantly luminous," as Carlyle calls them, to rise from the darkness of his life, no wishes for a future. But he rallied gallantly in a fresh tremendous effort to express himself, and then it became evident to me that a new voice, born of love, was speaking for the first time in his desolate life.

It went against me to forbid him to express himself, although it became my imperative duty to enforce silence contrary to my

own wishes. His character had always been a strong one, though it had repelled me, and I could not but be afraid that every effort he was making was consuming so much of the necessary oil of life. I had no occasion to pride myself on the self-restraint which I had exercised in only allowing myself to answer his one question of supreme importance. Every other medical man would have done the same in such a case. And yet, when the morning was far advanced, and I kept my patient more calm under the influence of a narcotic, I could not help a slight regret that I had felt it to be necessary to stop a probable confession.

That in his hour of utmost need the wretched man had been willing and even desirous to confide in me, and that such an opportunity might not again occur, was borne in upon me with some vexation as I went to my daily work. As I returned on foot to my own breakfast, and drove in my carriage to visit my other patients, a sort of oppression seemed to weigh upon me, as I thought of the miserable man dreading to venture into the darkness alone, with no one to hold out a helping hand to him, and none to shed a tear over his grave. It haunted me to remember how his bleared and sunken eyes had rested with an expression of despair on the familiar objects in the room. I thought how willingly he would have been a boy again. And yet life was so short—"one hour for a butterfly," twenty years for the average man—but who could tell after all what was short or what was long? The visible work of the last thousands of years had been quickly enough done from a geologist's point of view, and it comforted me to fancy that for some of the Creator's children it might take hundreds of years at least before they could be perfectly taught the right. It was not my way to give up hope about any one, and yet I was strangely depressed that day as I drove past the little church, and thought of God's-acre near it, and the neglected corner which we had chosen for Mysie's grave. People were already beginning to talk of new and better methods of disposing of their dead, and I confess it seemed to me that the church to which we resorted to pay acts of joyous worship would be better separated from the churchyard, with its solemn suggestions of the questions, whence we come, and whither we go.

One of my fears proved not to be groundless, for on the following day, though my patient seemed to be wandering and attacked with a sombre melancholy, I found that every method was adopted by Tom Barton and his wife to prevent my being left with the sick man alone. I was indignant with their heartlessness. Both were sitting in the sick-room. But their

appetites seemed to be unusually large, and both had been regaling themselves on nothing more important than a crisp brown loaf and yellow butter, with a pipkin stewing something warm on the fire, for Simon was an enemy to anything like butcher's meat in his house. It seemed to me that they were determined to take possession.

"This will not do at all," I said, speaking severely, "you will contaminate the atmosphere."

For the man had been smoking; and, though he took the pipe out of his mouth, and knocked away the ashes as I spoke, there was a stare of non-intelligence in his face, as if he were bent on thwarting me, and knew that there was an ugly look-out before him.

"I think this very strange," I said, trying to speak judicially, and feeling sure in my secret heart that the man was an inhuman wretch. "I cannot think what you can mean by installing yourselves in this room. Mr. Shaw cannot want two nurses, the one he has must be a trained one."

"She does not come—she does not come," muttered the patient, who was groaning on the bed, "the numbers of times that I have called her, and she does not come. I am thirsty, I am cold. They are tired of waiting upon me. They wish me to be dead. No, no," he said, with the crafty look returning to his face, when I peremptorily ordered a fire to be lit—"I did not mean a fire—I am not cold in that way. I cannot be so extravagant as to have a fire in my room."

All this in his thick utterance, so that one could interpret it in two ways. I saw that I had no longer any hope of obtaining his confidence, and that he was equally on the alert at the supposed plotting of the Bartons. He had become contemptuous and discontented.

"What a way he puts himself into," exclaimed the woman, at her wits' end.

"Yes; don't you see it is the nature of the malady? His mental condition is as if he were in a kind of fog at sea. He is floundering about in a kind of hopeless, mazy way," I said, attempting to pacify them.

But just then he became suspicious.

"It's a barefaced swindle," he said; "take them away—order them out of my rooms."

"Don't you see, you must humour him," I added, glad of the opportunity. "Don't you be anxious about him. I know a good trained nurse. I promise you she shall be here within an hour's time."

So, half coaxing and half driving, I got the room to myself.

But though the sick man looked at me doubtfully, as if wanting to speak, his utterance again deserted him. His mind was still wandering; his tongue was hopelessly tied. I went away after procuring the sick-nurse, and seeing her sit down by him, with a load of grief and anxiety weighing upon me. I felt convinced that he had something to say which would now most probably never be said. And my heart ached for him, but I was powerless as before.

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IV.

I KNEW that superstition still lingered among the people of Halstead, perhaps because they had never heard of School Boards, and were less nimble-witted than the people in other counties who lived nearer London. But all my experience had scarcely prepared me for such an episode as took place in Simon's best sitting-room that night.

The sitting-room was rarely used, having been shut up to save expense since the death of Mrs. Shaw. But Tom Barton, who was a votary of Bacchus, was accustomed sometimes to spend his evenings in the tap-room of an adjacent old gabled house, called the "Harbour Bar," at which *habitués* as well as casuals would come dropping in by twos and threes, to drink gin-and-water, puff vigorously at their pipes, and discuss the gossip of the place. On this occasion some of the village veterans, who were curious about Simon Shaw, and who were perfectly willing to recognise a future host in Tom Barton, had come to comfort him in a genial way. All signs of hilarity were conscientiously repressed, as Tom's wife had explained how the nurse was keeping watch with the sick man "as quiet as quiet" in his bed, and not allowed to stir hand or foot for his life.

One of the men, who had the gift of silence, and who had consequently acquired a reputation for wisdom, relaxed from his usual rule, and turned the conversation on ghosts. Another of the stoutest and most stolid, who openly expressed his indignation that the law would not allow him to "have up" a woman whom he knew, who had the evil eye, and who was said to have bewitched his cows and pigs, shook his head over ghosts. He believed, as he said, in toads, and it was his conviction that there was a toad "nailed up somewheres," which, if it could be "took down," would abate Master Shaw's pains.

The darkness had increased by this time, and the mist, so common at Halstead, was beginning to penetrate the room, which was somewhat musty from the want of proper airing.

A silence fell on the group, for, though candles were brought, the atmosphere was so humid that these did little to mitigate the obscuration.

Each man looked fearfully at his neighbour, and then one, more courageous than the rest, said, in a jubilant voice :

"If there are ghosts at all, why shouldn't they be pleasant company?"

"Ay," answered another, "I calls that fairly practical. When a ghost appears, speak to him, that's what I ses."

"And hask him 'ow he comes to 'ave 'is clothes on," said another sternly.

"Now I never could account for *that*. Ghosts is ghosts, and clothes is clothes—they're different articles altogether, you'll all admit *that*," he continued, gathering courage from his own remarks, and striking his hand on the table.

"Don't you be a meddling radical, John Drew, or it'll be the wuss for ye," said the second speaker, who was wedded to the older civilisation, and whose nerves, though he did not like to admit it, were just a little jarred by the resonant noise caused by the blow of such a huge fist on the table.

"Well, as I was saying, clothes is clothes, and a man doesn't like to see a female ghost dressed like a rope-dancer ; there s no sort of fitness in it. I put it to the company."

Everybody seemed to be duly impressed, so much so that for a few moments not a word was spoken.

Then one of the men dropped his pipe and every one started, the cowardice as well as the courage of fools proceeding from not knowing what is the proper object of fear. When the pipe had been lifted up and duly inspected, the Conservative, Amos Newbridge, spoke in a solemn whisper.

"It's my opinion, sonny, as it'll do you no good to mock at ghosts in this 'ere place, seeing it is well beknown that there is ghost stories, and ghost stories as has took place at Halstead."

There was something of the style of pulpit oratory in the opening of this address, on which Amos justly prided himself, and the chairs were drawn closely together as he continued :

"Did any of you 'ere present ever hear tell of the tolling o' the church bell as woke parson up in the dead o' night, with the pit-a-pat o' horses' hoofs, and no horses and no living hands to ring 'em?" triumphantly asked Amos, becoming in his elation slightly confused. "H'm, and saved a poor crittur's life as was well-nigh forfeited. For when parson went out to see who had been playing tricks to make the ringin' o' that 'ere bell, he found a poor girl with a bad fellow who had got her there for to murder her. At sight o' parson he made hoff."

"That don't prove that he meant murder," remarked the Radical, as he knocked the ashes from his pipe with a look of scepticism which was certainly disconcerting.

"Why, firstly," explained Amos, with an air of speaking down to the non-intelligent, and counting each point in the argument on his gnarled old fingers—"firstly, there was the bell; secondarily, there was parson; thirdly, there was the girl. Don't be out o' heart, John Drew, if yer have not the gift o' comprehension."

This was again felt to be impressive, and each man looked at the ceiling where the smoke was lingering in the heavy atmosphere, and forming a sort of imitation sounding-board above the heads of the orators.

"I don't believe, as I said before, in ghosts trying to frighten us," answered the incorrigible youth, who was determined not to be put down. He would have liked to emulate Amos, and get up to make a speech, like commercial travellers are said to do for the sake of whiling away the time. But the privilege of holding forth at any length was monopolised by the older men at the "Harbour Bar," and a toothless oracle named Jem Harper took up the parable in a mumbling voice.

"Don't ye, sonny? Why, a mon as is a living mon is bound to be skeered. It's a thing as is and yet as isn't—a 'pearance, so to speak, where there's nothin'. I speak as one who knows; for when there was corpse-liftin' in this 'ere parish, and when the knocking come from the coffin o' Daniel Blount, as was as fine a corpse as could be seen in the three kingdoms—and I speak as one as knows, for I helped to carry him to the grave mysel'—and when that 'ere coffin was hopened and found to be nothing but stones in it. Well, one night as I was a-coming——"

The other men were leaning forward listening to the thrilling tale, and wishing that Jem Harper's stumps of teeth would allow him to tell it more plainly, when a muffled groan from the lad who had so bravely declared his scepticism about ghosts drew their attention to the fact that on a chair which had hitherto been unoccupied sat a figure in white, with a face like a corpse and the features of Simon Shaw. The figure, which was immovable, seemed to loom through the cloud of smoke, but there was a threatening look about the eyes which gave terrible point to Jem Harper's philosophic remark, that the terror of a ghost was caused by the fact that it has the appearance of form without the reality, and such an appearance was likely to be intimidating.

A sharp shudder ran through the group—a shiver of horror through their veins.

Tom Barton was the first to make off, overturning his chair, but he was speedily followed by John Drew. And though Amos Newbridge experienced a sort of dreary delight in the fact that he would be able to crow over the youth if he ever came alive out of the ordeal, he followed with shaking knees, knocking his ancient shins against the table. Then there was a general scuffle, in which glasses were broken, pipes thrown down, and the men, losing all sense of propriety, and fighting with each other, made helter-skelter for the door.

No one knew quite what had happened till they found themselves alive outside, with unbroken bones; and no one—not even Tom Barton, who wandered about for hours—dreamed of going back to elucidate the mystery. It was long since the village of Halstead had been stirred by such an excitement. For the story had flown from mouth to mouth, and was known even to the children by the time that the news reached me on the following morning, that not only was Simon Shaw dead, but that his ghost had appeared already.

The messenger who came to me with the news had yielded to the general panic. He had lost his good sense and self-command, and could only tell me that Mrs. Barton, and even the nurse, were "afeered to venture nigh the corpse;" that strange noises were heard in the room; and that they humbly hoped I would write the certificate of death, and help them to hurry the funeral as quickly as possible.

I was on the scene without delay, and found the Bartons hanging about the door, half-stupid and dazed, and yet with a species of elation. For already a sort of will was spoken of, in which the wretched old man had left the whole of his property to these designing people. I was doubtful if such a will would be of much use in a court of law, and equally doubtful whether I could gain anything for the grand-daughter, if I chose to fight it. I was not very much struck by Barton's hang-dog demeanour, which might have been accounted for, as he had not as yet recovered the fright of the preceding night. But my first glance at the nurse's countenance set me thinking. It expressed dismay, and her first words to me were those of apology for not remaining, as she was bound to do, in charge of the dead man.

"You had no right to leave the room till I came," I said angrily. "What was there to be afraid of? You should have remained there at all costs."

Something rose in her throat, which seemed to choke her voice, and then she burst into a flood of tears, which were surely not for old Simon.

"He went off so unexpected and sudden-like," she said,

through her sobs; "and I hadn't time to call no one—it ain't no use to be a-blamin' me."

"It seems to me that you are taking blame on yourself; no one else talked of blaming you," I said severely, certain that there was something to account for this rain of tears, and that it was my duty to get to the bottom of it. "Mrs. Heathcote, do you recollect that years ago you had a bad habit of drinking spirits, and that you made up your mind to take the pledge, and give that horrible habit up? Now you are in a house where that sort of thing is encouraged. I myself heard Mrs. Barton urge her husband's friends to 'drink bold' by way of hospitality one night. Can you look me honestly in the face, and tell me that you had no gin last night?"

Her face was red, her eyes were blood-shot, and she could not look me in the face, as she began, with many protestations, that it was not her fault if the Bartons were "that liberal," and she had found it better just for once to take a little "summat hot" to take out "an interior buzzing" in her head. She was agitated, and we were wasting time. So I waited till we had mounted the stairs, and stood in presence of the dead man.

Candles were burning on the mantelpiece, and the curtains had been drawn to shut out the air and light. I quickly undrew the curtains, blew out the lights, and then I continued my inquisition.

"Sally Heathcote, it will be better for you to give over this blubbering and make a clean breast of it. You are not a bad woman at bottom, and you will be a thousand times more comfortable when you have confessed. Tell me the truth. Were you overcome by sleep last night when you ought to have been watching your patient?"

She as good as went on her knees, so frightened was she as she answered. But all the woman came to the front as she added, almost passionately:

"I'm sure I don't want to hurt no one, and I'm as sorry as can be for what has happened. I ain't one to grumble at the doin's o' Providence, though they be above our understandin'-like, but I don't like them Bartons gettin' to all 'is money, and the young leddy as is his grandchild—as sweet and neat-lookin' as a pink—cut off wi'out a penny. I don't like it, no more than you, sir, and I ain't one to tell no lies," she added, groping for her handkerchief, and trying furtively to wipe away a tear or two.

"It's my opinion," I said angrily, "that you have been guilty of the most culpable negligence, not only in sleeping at your watch, but in allowing yourself to be hastened in laying out the

dead. Stop that mawkish nonsense at once, and do what you can to help me; we have no time to lose."

And then I gave all my attention to the corpse; for something about the appearance of it had attracted my attention directly I entered the room.

Never had I met with a case in which the desire for pecuniary gain had more completely extinguished all human feeling. What the man had been was nothing; what he had made and saved was everything. The gold was everything; the temple which might have sanctified the gold, nothing. The body had been hastily washed, put in this darkened room with lighted candles by it, and treated as if it were a sort of fetish. And downstairs they were already consulting together how they could get the hideous reminder of human mortality as quickly as possible out of sight.

A cloth had been tied round the poor face. I stripped it off at once.

"Don't stand staring like an idiot," I said passionately, in my turn. "But get me a kettle of boiling water; I saw one downstairs—a good-sized brass tea-kettle in which water was beginning to boil. I dare say they were preparing it for their orgies. Bring it here at once—*at once*," I continued, with a stamp of authority, as she still stood staring with wide-open mouth, and the colour had faded on her cheek. "Don't utter a syllable to any one; but if you ever wish to be employed again as a nurse, not only in this parish, but anywhere in England, do as I tell you."

I shall never forget the anxiety with which I tore open the shroud and counted the moments till she returned. It was not only that anything new in the way of scientific experiment had always considerable attraction for me, but in this case the welfare of the innocent for generations to come possibly depended on the success of my experiment. It was not so much the money as the possibility that Mary's mother might be cleared, and Mary's descendants relieved from an ignominy hard to bear, which made my breath come in quick gasps of excitement. Every instant was of importance; for I felt convinced that the sick man had probably stolen downstairs, while the nurse whom I had foolishly trusted was sleeping in intoxication; that he had been either delirious or sleep-walking when he was attracted by the noise in the sitting-room, and that the cold and dangerous amount of fatigue to which the invalid had been exposed had made him fall into a state of trance when he returned to his bed. An idea had occurred to me directly of working upon the

superstitious fear of a scamp like Tom Barton, who already thought he had seen a ghost, and making him show himself in his true colours.

If I had only had a voltaic battery! But the application of electricity was impossible at so short a notice.

There was a tap at the door. I went forward to take the kettle out of the nurse's hand, but I did not allow her to enter. I closed the door and locked it. Then I commenced my work, pouring a continuous stream of boiling water on the region of the heart.

My gaze was riveted on the face, and after an instant or two I was convinced that the stony rigidity had relaxed, and I could almost have burst into a shout of triumph as I saw that a small portion of the eyes was exposed which had hitherto been covered. I continued my exertions, and in another moment there was a visible movement in the body, almost as if it had stretched itself. I tore off more of the trappings, breathing into the mouth and chafing the limbs, and then rushing to unlock the door, and calling loudly for the Bartons, I supported the body with pillows, putting my arm behind the back.

The effect was indescribable. Barton no sooner entered the room in which a dead man restored to life was apparently sitting upright and confronting him than, connecting the uncanny sight with the ghost of the preceding night, he fell abjectly on the ground, appealing to Heaven to have mercy on him. As to his wife, she disappeared in a mysterious way, as if she had instinctively returned to that infantine method of locomotion, which is supposed to be a survival of the earlier habits of the race. Perhaps the effort of crawling tired her out, for she was afterwards found in a swoon in the adjoining room.

"Restore the money you have unjustly taken, tear up the pretended will, and let the property be returned to the old man's grandchild," I said, while I still continued my attentions to the patient, whose consciousness, as well as his flickering life, seemed to be only by degrees returning to him.

That life was restored but for a few months, but long enough for me to dispossess the Bartons of their fictitious rights, and to bring Simon's grand-daughter to nurse him.

Best of all, when the old sinner discovered how nearly he had been given over to one of the most horrible forms of death, and when he was freed from the thraldom which his servants had exercised over him, he manifested a late repentance. He had not known that his daughter had been married to Stephen Blair, and had allowed Captain Stewart to persuade him into

the hatching of one of the vilest of plots, with the idea of scaring her into breaking her engagement. His subsequent angry demeanour, as he wanted us to think, was partly caused by his sorrow at Mysie's sudden death. And after his first vehement declaration that he would never own the infant, his pride had forbidden him to remedy his mistake.

# SELF-ACCUSED

## I.

ONE of the defects which has always worried me—not only in nervous patients, but in human beings generally—is an ungrateful tendency which makes us "go heavily" when we are deprived of all the smaller gifts of fortune, although we may be loaded with the greatest blessings.

Reginald Dene was no exception to this rule. He was rich, he came of a good family, he had numerous friends, and his abilities were beyond the common. Yet from boyhood he had an aching sense of dissatisfaction because the kindly providence—which modern scientists dub by the name of Nature—that had loaded him with all these good things from his cradle had withheld one gift. And, in the fact that the gift had been withheld, the sensitive lad believed himself to be exceptionally afflicted. He was downright ugly; there was no denying it. His schoolfellows and his friends teased him about his ugliness, as people are apt to tease those of their acquaintances who are good-natured and whom they like, in spite of their banter.

To my mind there was never anything forbidding in the boy's exterior; the expression of his face sufficiently redeemed it. The smile was so full of goodness that it was a pleasant surprise, and, in spite of the ruggedness of his features, I noticed that dumb animals were always attracted to him. Well, and why not? A boy who could pick up and nurse a wounded bird, tie a splint to the broken leg of a rabbit, and coddle it until it recovered, ought to have had some gracious handwriting on that ill-cut face which the so-called brutes perhaps could decipher, when his fellow-creatures could not. I have always had a theory that these dumb creatures, whose real natures are such a mystery in our

midst, and of whom we know as little as we do of the inhabitants of some distant planet, may have keener intuitions about *us*, our failings and our upward strivings, than we imagine at present.

And, whatever faults Reginald Dene might have had, there was nothing mean and trivial; nothing that Carlyle would have called "sawdustish" about his disposition from a boy. His instincts were good and true, and as he grew into manhood the very simplicity of his character baffled the people who did not understand him. It was beyond them. They could not make out the difference between being childlike and childish. They did not see that the singleness of his eye, which led him to resent anything mean and wrong, and that the intensity of his nature in which the affections were warm and deep, accounted for some of those explosions of anger in which he would vehemently denounce "a spade as a spade." They were not even aware of the fault which I deplored in him—a sensitiveness which was so great as to be likely to degenerate into morbidness, though the sensitiveness in itself was more or less inseparable from that innate refinement which was one of his finest qualities, and which ought not to have had cold water thrown on it. It seemed unnatural to credit so ugly a man with sensitive feelings, and an immense capacity for suffering, making him endure at times the most exquisite agonies which others might have averted by a word or a look. Still less did it seem natural to suppose that he would have rose-coloured visions which should not have been rudely dispelled, and that his power of receiving pleasure was proportionally great.

With his own fastidious susceptibility to external appearances, he fancied that no man or woman could really care for him.

"Nature has given me a sort of mask, fit only to laugh at," he said to me bitterly, one day, when I accused him of retiring from his fellows. "Little Barbara," he said, "when she sees me, always laughs. I suppose I have a sort of Punch-and-Judy face."

"She laughs because she likes you. It is her way of showing her liking," I answered quickly. "And, indeed, you are somewhat hard on 'Nature,' as you call her, who has given you so many other good things that she must have her own way of striking the balance. She's not like a methodical machine, whatever the philosophers may say; and, having been too prodigal to you in other ways, she has pulled up like a good mother for fear of spoiling you. Why, you beggar, what do you expect?" I continued cheerfully; "we must all of us take the rough with the smooth."

I wanted to put the boy in good heart. For, indeed, I understood his allusion to Barbara better than at that time he understood it himself. He and Barbara Dalton had been companions from childhood. He had helped her with her books from the time she was a little girl, languidly beginning the lesson which she could not bear. The children had been near neighbours. The little house in which the Heathcotes lived stood at the foot of a wild ravine, and almost at the very gates leading to the larger manor, which from generation to generation had belonged to the Denes. Together the little ones had toddled to gather the transparent shells and tangled wealth of seaweed thrown up by the tide which lapped the sands in summer. And when the autumn storms had come, filling the becks and the tiny, silvery streams—which rushed down from the fractured sides of the cliffs—and throwing foam in the children's faces from the white-flecked sea, they were still to be seen together. I often looked after them—the boy carrying the little girl on his sturdy back wherever the sand was shining or the shingle was sharp, lest she should hurt her feet, or wet her boots, and I wondered how long the attachment would continue.

I have used the word "attachment," but I ought to explain that it was all on one side. If indeed, as Reginald fancied in his more morbid moods, he in one respect was exceptionally afflicted, to be afflicted in that way seemed to be exceptionally bettered. The consciousness of his own deficiency had drawn out the more unselfish qualities of the boy, till at times I longed to remind him that selfishness and self-preservation were quite distinct things. When a hamper of apples or of sweet-meats came to him at school he was said to share them with his fellows. But the sharing generally ended in having nothing left for himself. And when he played bolstering matches with pillows with his baby-brother, he ran a risk of suffocation from a desire to please the little fellow. So it was with Barbara. Already in the dame-school for little boys and girls, at which, in an old-fashioned way, the two conned lessons together, when some bigger fellows sneered at her as a "duffer" for not being able to pronounce a classical name, Reginald fought her battles, and came home with swollen eyes and a bloody nose from his determination to punish the bully. And when little "Bab" grew into her teens still patronised by others, in the long-legged, long-armed, Cochin-China fowl stage of girlhood, she was already, to Reginald's thought, a paragon of graceful, gifted girls, becoming still further off and unattainable as the years went by. You might as well have asked some octogenarian of the honest "John Anderson, my Jo" stamp, if he remembered

much of the time before he was married, as have asked Reginald Dene when he began to care for Barbara. He seemed to himself never really to have existed without caring for her. And though his innocent, childish affection satisfied that pathetic yearning for appreciation, never sufficiently gratified in other ways in his childhood, even then the dream of his life seemed to be only how to serve her and please her, and to anticipate her every wish without seeking for reward.

It was a bad thing for her. It helped to spoil her, and there are too many people always ready to spoil a pretty girl. For as Bab grew out of the awkward stage, with hair which seemed to have caught its tints from the golden-brown water rippling over the mossy boulders, and eyes of the blue forget-me-nots, which grew on the borders of the little brawling stream, it was difficult to remember that her girlish beauty would be ephemeral. I must confess that the impression which she made on most of us was like a refreshing scent, or a tone of real music—a touch of fresh, exuberant life. She knew her power over Reginald and rejoiced in it, as it was in the nature of things that she should rejoice—the discovery of power being pleasant to most of us. But I was glad to see that she valued that power; for he was a man that no girl could think herself injured at being asked to love. It counted for something, I suppose, that he had property, and that the match-making mothers went so far as to range themselves absolutely in his favour. They did not believe, as they told their marriageable daughters, that young Mr. Dene was bad-tempered, and they were quite certain that he was neither vicious nor selfish, while he contrasted favourably with the more handsome adventurers who might make themselves fools over a girl, but had not a penny to bless themselves with.

This sort of talk was especially in vogue after the death of Reginald's father, when the elder son was left heir to all the property, with the exception of a small provision for a younger brother, who years before had been sent off to a public school, and was now making his way in India. There were one or two fast girls in the neighbourhood who were ready to follow the advice of the elder women, to set their caps at the young landed proprietor, and to minimise his ugliness in consideration of other advantages. But Reginald was not "spoons," as they called it, on any of them—that ugly slang, which I especially detest when it falls from women's lips, was just then beginning to be in fashion. He had eyes for no one but the playmate of his childhood, and no blandishments were likely to change him. Such as he was, it might have been said of him, like Pitt, that he "did not grow, he was cast." A more absolutely faithful

creature it would not have been possible to conceive, and probably he would have been just as faithful even had there been more imperfections in his idol. I remember how he told me once, with a little sigh, that, though he intended to build better cottages for the labourers on his small estate, yet in his secret heart he preferred the moss-grown thatches, with the rule-defying honeysuckle, and pert dog-roses, which insisted on climbing about the old tumble-down porches. He hated the painful monotony and the starched, rigid character of model cottages. And I remember also that, while I laughed at him for his misgivings, and commended him for his high purpose, saying "it was a pity he should be drawn from it," I could not help thinking of little Barbara, with her locks, often wind-blown, and her wilful little ways.

For Reginald—especially since his father's death—was the serious, earnest side of life; for sunny-haired Bab the fits of independence and the laughter. I think he liked her all the better for giving rein to her high spirits, and even for her rebellious ways. And, indeed, it was a good thing that she had a spice of mischief in her character, and was able to help herself when another girl might have been too coy. For, if the lad had not had somebody to lead him on a bit, it is possible that his poor opinion of himself would have prevented him from finding out that his attachment was reciprocated.

What a heavenly morning it was when I first met Reginald Dene with that new look upon his face, which told me at once what had happened! What a dewy, sunshiny morning! I remember it was in mid-April, and there was a stir of life everywhere, making one feel as if one could almost hear the flow of sap in the hidden roots of trees, and see the green buds unfolding. Young Dene was striding down the road which led from the ravine to the white-flecked sea. I knew that he had just come from the Heathcotes' cottage, and I did not require to be told the news which I afterwards heard, as I saw the new light in his face, which he had spoken of so bitterly as a mask to make one laugh. It did not look grotesque then, or for some time afterwards, perhaps because it was illuminated by the full satisfaction of the fine, "Bayard-like soul." Well, it may be admitted he was a little over chivalrous in his devotion to the girl of his choice, but it was a fault on the right side—not common in the present day. And then he was as immensely happy, as fervid, earnest natures are apt to be. He had gained a tremendous victory over his own nerves and chagrin. So far was he from lamenting his own deficiency any more, that during the whole of that succeeding summer he trod as if no

longer on prosaic earth ; all Nature was literally transformed for him ; it did one good to see a fellow so happy. It seemed as if all his faculties were enlarged, and he had an endless capacity for healthy enjoyment. Ay, and for work, too ; for in his new-found happiness he was still immensely unselfish, and was full of schemes for the public good. That warm, strong love of his not only destroyed his grievance, but seemed to endow him with a fulness of life, as if he had a superabundance of energy to communicate to his neighbours.

There is an old saying that we always value what we find hardest to get, and Barbara thought she was acting wisely in not holding herself too cheap. But she made what was to my mind a deplorable mistake in stipulating for a long engagement. I blamed myself for being apprehensive, but I had seen so many things, which promised fairly, go wrong in my life, that I began to liken myself to one of the old sailors at Halstead, who had been so long used to watching the sea-line that they could anticipate the frowning of a storm not generated. I tried to argue myself out of my fears ; but as the summer days passed, with the tall fox-gloves fading first, and then the bracken turning yellow, and the glossy hart's-tongue fern looking limp and disconsolate in the ravine, where the leaves of the slender birch-trees were being shaken off with the blasts of wind, I could not help feeling sorry that there had been no sound of wedding bells. We could no longer watch beautiful shadows among the dolphin hues of the waves ; for instead of smiles on the dimpled surface of the ever changeful sea, there was now the heavy Atlantic swell, with its muffled thunderous noise against the cliffs, or its sullen roll on the shingle. The seagulls flew about screaming, and the solemn cormorants were sitting on jutting ledges of black rock, on the day when I heard the news that Charlie Dene was expected on a visit to his brother. Reginald was radiant when he met me and told me the news, and he added that I must help him to stir up the Halstead people, as the Anglo-Indian was accustomed to receive unbounded hospitality. I cannot say that Charlie Dene impressed me favourably when he came. I cannot quite explain my prejudice, but I had never cared for him from a boy. And whenever I felt that sort of prejudice—it was the "I do not like thee, Dr. Fell," sort of thing, and of course utterly absurd and unreasonable—I tried to fight against it in a logical way.

It had struck me years before, when the two were boys, that Charlie was always trying to get the good things from his brother, and that he had even dreamt for a time of a remote possibility of succeeding to the family wealth. It was just as

likely as not that Reginald in some morbid fit should retire to some remote corner of the Antipodes, and leave the estate to him. It seemed to me that Charles was ever looking out for some bold stroke of fortune in his favour. I had likened him in my secret heart to Jacob, the supplanter. Well, now that he had come back, I determined to do my best to like him and to see him from his own point of view. And yet such a triumph over prejudice could not come all at once to me, and I could not help wondering in my secret heart why such men were made.

"What a coxcomb he is getting!" I said to myself, directly I saw the fellow; and then in the next breath I reminded myself that it was unfair to accuse him of foppery, and an objection to reddening his face, just because, when the tan wore off, he looked as if he had been whitewashed by the Indian climate. Such an unhealthy waxiness of complexion it was rare to see in a man. And then the minor appointments of his costume were always so perfectly finished, and every detail of his physique so faultless, that one felt almost angry with him, as if he had wrapped his hands up in cotton wool, and must waste a lot of time in admiring those precious members of his, with the pink filbert-shaped finger-nails.

"A beau is everything of a woman but the sex, and nothing of a man besides," I grumbled to Jenny, quoting Fielding's words. But she shook her head at me, telling me I was a "wretched old bear," and perfectly absurd in my objection to the "*jeunesse dorée*" of which I had such a horror.

Certainly the winter was a cold one, and you could not expect a man who had just come from India to expose himself with impunity to its pitiless blasts. And Charlie never looked to better advantage than in the velveteen coats in which he lounged by the fireside, while Reginald—who had the interests of his tenants at heart—was tramping in his knickerbockers over the bleak-looking moors.

"*They* cannot dress themselves up," he said to me laughingly, one day when I met him splashed up to his knees and miles away in one of those narrow paths which some one had compared to a parting line between the shaggy hair of the heath. "These moors have to wear the same old brown primitive clothing which they have donned from prehistoric times."

It struck me that his face was flushed, and that there was a little bitterness in his laugh as he added, in answer to my question why he had wandered so far:

"Some of us are born to do the useful, and others the ornamental in life. *I* should only be in a false position, if I could

afford to sit at home and play the violin ; the mongrel dogs must be turned out."

He laughed again. What was there in the laugh which made me feel perfectly sure he had gone through one of those rebounds common to highly-strung natures—so easily wrung? I looked after him as he strode down the shoulder of the headland, and the curve of the hill hid him from my view. I knew instantly that some of that cynical talk about "Beauty and the Beast" which had been going on lately in Blackquay and the neighbourhood of Halstead, and which had grated on my own ears, must have reached his.

"No one would have dreamt of talking in that way before Charlie came back. No one would have been so cruel!" I said half savagely to myself, as I spurred on my horse, feeling, as Reginald did, as if my mind for once were in tune with the sombreness of a scenery which would have been distasteful to a beauty-loving Greek.

"I hate all that sort of talk. No one but a relation would have ventured to begin it," I grumbled on to myself, as I looked down from the heights on the tempest-riven sea and the slate-coloured waste of wildly-rushing water. The patient was dying whom I had been called to see. I had expected as much. But it was the solemn end of one of those hard lives carried on by many an isolated shepherd in a more or less bitter struggle for the necessaries of existence. It did not make my mood less stern towards that dainty, ease-loving epicureanism that had always irritated me.

"If we could get that fellow back to India, or set him to breaking stones on the road," I muttered between my set teeth that evening.

"Now, Tom, I think that is a little uncharitable. You know Charlie Dene talks of a Swiss tour, and a man who talks of climbing mountains can't be such a sybarite," answered my little wife, trying to soothe me.

"Let him talk," I growled in reply ; "it is all of a piece with his other wretched selfishness. If he climbs Swiss mountains, he will have Reginald dangling after him. It is arranged, I believe, already for the two to go a bachelor tour, and that will be another excuse for delaying the marriage."

Jenny sighed. She too had heard the sort of gossip which was going about Blackquay. I blamed myself afterwards for not having ventured to give Miss Delmott and her set a piece of my mind. It seemed as if Halstead was to reap a ghastly harvest from that wretched sowing of dragon's-teeth, which effected much ruin before I attempted to stop it. Perhaps

Jenny thought as well as I did in her secret heart that this marriage would never come off. For latterly Barbara Dalton had given herself petulant airs. Present after present had been showered on her by her devoted lover. At one time it was a magnificent diamond ring, at another a pearl necklace, and at another an emerald brooch with jewels of extravagant size; and then, after all, the little witch would prove she cared nothing for any of these adornments by appearing at some important party in a simple white dress with not a trace of jewellery of any kind.

"And much better she looks without them—girls always do; only it was such a pity she hankered after them at all!" said Jenny, who was sorely puzzled, knowing as well as I did how it was the constant purchase of these costly adornments which had given point to those foolish tales about the Beauty and her poor Beast.

"Of course it is to be expected that, when a girl is ill-mated, there should be some sort of a set-off to the unfortunate bargain," people had gone so far as to say. And so it became a joke, whenever there was a fresh *douceur* for the bride, as poor Reginald's handsome presents came in time to be called.

I knew that the poor fellow was beginning to suffer from a disenchantment, all the more bitter to him because his dreams had lasted from childhood, and I knew also that he would not entertain a disloyal thought of his brother. His bearing in public was one of quiet dignity blended with proud reserve, but to those who knew him he no longer attempted to hide the fact that his feelings of wild delight and triumphant exultation were all over, and that a sort of reaction had come.

No doubt he knew that I must hear the gossip, and, as he had never had any optimist instincts to buoy him up about his own appearance, he went so far as to look in my presence at his own uninviting reflection in the mirror, which—according to the fashion of those days—was let in above the dining-room sideboard. There was sardonic humour in the glance which he cast at the reflection of himself.

"Doctor, there are many things you can mend," he said. "You carry surgery to a wonderful pitch of art, they say. Perhaps one day they will come to manufacturing new coverings of flesh for poor spirits in prison like myself—who knows? But it will not be in my time; and meanwhile there is no receipt for the manufacture of a winning smile to gain a lady's heart—on a repulsive face like mine? No; perhaps I wronged Barbara."

I scarcely remember what I answered. I only know that I

fumed and growled and stamped about in a way which would have made Jenny think I had taken leave of my senses, if she could have seen me, and also that I was utterly illogical, as people generally are when they let their wits get addled with excitement. I vowed in one breath that a girl who could care for mere outward veneer deserved to wait and see the high colour of rottenness come out beneath the delicacy of the veneer which she was such a fool as to admire; that it would not matter a pin if Reginald did not marry at all, and, in fact, bachelors were some of the happiest people in the world, according to my experience of them. And then, because I could not bear to see the look of heartbreak in the poor fellow's face, I was guilty of the palpable contradiction of declaring that, if he gave up Barbara, it might be the blighting of her whole life; that the girl was young and heedless, and it was Reginald's fault to make an idol of her; in idolatry there must ever be restlessness and disappointment. In fact I talked myself into a passion, and hardly knew what I said, so sorry was I to hear the voice which sounded as if it were strangled in his throat. I did not need any one to tell me that his heart was very sore, though he would not breathe a word of censure upon others, and I could not let him know how perfectly well I was aware of the fact that his brother could often utter the cruellest remarks in a semi-jocose, irritating way.

I spoke in haste, and my words went for nothing. I only remember how Reginald stared at me in a sort of dumb amazement, and how I made confusion worse by trying to give a hint which would have come so easily from Jenny, of how God's dealings with us were often so inscrutable that what we took for the withholding of a blessing was often only a merciful visitation of the Divine pity—removing gifts which might become pitfalls, and do no end of injury.

I saw at once that I had made a further mistake. He was not in a humour for sermonising.

"Indeed, if things are to go on in this way, the whole of a fine character will be crumbling soon into a sort of dry-rot," I said, a short time afterwards, in despair; "I never saw a young fellow altered so much for the worse."

"Does he know how very often those two are together?" asked Jenny, in a low tone.

I winced and shrugged my shoulders instead of answering her. For the spring days had come round again, and, though my interlocutor looked searchingly at me, I had determined that nothing should induce me to tell of how more than once—when the sun had been glinting through interstices of waving

green boughs, and when fern-like mosses, delicate primroses, and early violets had been tesselating the coppices—I had met Charlie Dene and that foolish Bab wandering about near Halstead.

"It is surely very undesirable—not to say impossible—that these things should be kept from him long?"

"Well, and what prating fool would be cruel enough to put them into his head?" I answered testily. "I think as well as you do that one or other of them should be induced to listen to my advice—but it is not *my* affair. I blame myself for what I have said already," I answered, putting the subject determinedly on one side.

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II.

HE was a valiant man, that Reginald Dene. For, whatever he knew, he behaved in public as if his sufferings were over. He never even alluded again to the subject in private to me. But as the leaves increased on the trees, and that new spring began to play the exquisite tricks of light and shade which had so delighted him in her precursor, a look of quiet resignation returned to young Dene's face. The victory had been hard fought, but he was, as he had ever been, particularly courteous to his brother, and more gentle than ever to the penniless girl who had betrothed herself to him. True, he did not speak of his marriage. But it was as if a battle of some sort had been won by him. "Apollyon put his darts back again," as old John Bunyan would have said.

Did Charlie think his brother was afraid of him? And could not the womanly feeling of Barbara Dalton keep her from taking advantage of such forbearance? I asked myself these questions impatiently whenever I had time to think of them. For I had little confidence in that loosely-set, out-of-joint character, deficient in masculine conscience and consistent principle, which, rightly or wrongly, I had learnt to connect with Charles Dene. It had too much gloss upon it by half. Well, people must manage their own affairs! But in turn I was also fearful for the frail texture of Reginald's natural refinement; I was afraid that it had not strong fibre enough about it.

"That little girl wants a firm hand over her, and then she would be worth twenty of what she is at present," I said to myself, perhaps somewhat ungallantly, when I met Barbara one day full of girlish complaints about Reginald, and with a look

in her face like a child stinging its fingers with a nettle when it thinks to catch a bright butterfly.

Reginald, or somebody else, had put it into the head of the maiden aunt with whom she lived not to let her go to a certain picnic—though one of the ladies in the neighbourhood had promised to chaperon her. This was the burden of her complaint. But the large blue eyes flashed fire as she declared that she had never had tyranny before to bear in her life, and did not intend to put up with it from any one. Miss Dalton might be ill and not responsible for what she had said, she added, with a little sob, as if ashamed of her half-confidence, and yet conscious of the necessity for preparing me to hear something which might require her to exonerate herself. I was puzzled, for I could see that her heart was beating fast, half with fear of something as well as embarrassment. When we are vexed with ourselves, it is not easy to be amiable, and I saw that, though she wished to break the ice with me, it was by no means simple and easy for her, and she could only speak by a conscious effort. There was a sort of querulous impatience which I had never seen in her before. It was altogether foreign to her healthy nature, and seemed somehow to be out of keeping with her firm, elastic tread. Her face was flushed, and her bosom heaved as if under some sense of indignity which she could not conceal. What did it mean? I could not help fearing that the mention of the picnic was a blind, and that there might be something much more serious behind to account for the girl's agitation.

It was a tiresome position for me to be placed in. In such a difficult case, whatever a man may say may involve him almost hopelessly in irreparable mischief. My experience had taught me to answer with a kindly smile, a brief word, or a meaningless look, at the expense of seeming abrupt or unsympathetic. So, advising her with a feeble joke to "turn her back on the disagreeables of life, and think of something pleasant instead of troubling herself about trifles," I passed on to her aunt's house.

There again I felt it awkward when I was shown into a darkened room where eyes, which had more of pain in them than of any other expression, were lifted to mine appealingly, and the murmur, "Oh, doctor, I am glad you are come," warned me that the good lady was suffering from a shock of some kind.

Eleanor Dalton was indeed the victim of an insidious disease, which brought on attacks of violent pain. But she was accustomed to grappling silently with her enemy—her complaint being incurable—and I knew that something more than usual must have accounted for her sudden desire to see me, when she

was already instructed as to the use of the only remedies which medicine could afford to soothe her case. It was true that, unknown to her niece, she had been suffering from one of her "attacks," which had lasted for several hours ; true also that there was something behind the scenes to account for the prolonged nature of the violent paroxysm.

"I told you to keep your mind as quiet as possible," I said, a little reproachfully, as I put my hand on her pulse.

She considered for a moment, and then hesitatingly, and with a little air of mystery, she gasped out as well as she could that she was sure no good could come from Charlie Dene hanging about her house, or idling on the moors where he so often met her niece—fishing or pretending to sketch. It had been the same in the winter evenings with that violin-playing, and she was so afraid something was hidden ! Did Reginald know about those—letters ?

It was no business of mine, and so I tried not to show how her words affected me. I only asked, with a little scornfulness which I could not keep out of my voice, and with a sort of incredulity which deepened into contempt :

"If you mean that Charles Dene sends letters to your niece, I am quite sure his brother knows nothing about it."

She hesitated again, and then she faltered that she could not "quite make up her mind to intercept the letters, but she did not like it—no, she did not like it." When she had seen her niece with one and had asked for it, Barbara's fingers had closed almost convulsively on it, a sudden pallor had overspread her face, and her lips had been pressed obstinately together.

"No, she did not want to hint that her niece was to blame," the poor lady said, in the intervals of her pain ; "she really knew nothing at all about it, but she had always been afraid of the intimacy between the two families to this extent. Barbara was of course her own mistress," she added, with a little laugh which she hardly succeeded in making natural, "but she did not like to presume on the other poor fellow's perfect trust ; and, as to Charlie Dene, he was just the sort of man to take advantage of a girl's ignorance, and make love to a pretty girl without meaning much."

Her voice, which had been tremulous, was growing more and more husky. It was necessary for me to insist not only on her silence, but to make light of the matter.

We doctors are fain to be hypocrites in our assumed indifference, and to act as if we are machines even when conscious of being interested.

"It would be all plain sailing," I said, as I took my leave,

"if she were to settle herself to sleep, and not to trouble herself any more about it."

I did not allow myself to speculate; I had only to act. Barbara had no father, and, though I had no right to constitute myself the girl's protector, yet it was at least my duty to protect the invalid whose heart was sickened, and whose head was dizzy with a mental perplexity which she was unfitted by physical weakness to bear.

It was a very old story—only an old story—I said bitterly to myself, as I looked at the yellow sand now shining in the summer sun, through the clear water by which Barbara and Reginald had wandered so often as children. History repeated itself. The ancient sea, "distilled by the sun and kneaded by the moon," rolled on in the distance, as it had rolled for ages; the crags in the ravine were of the same picturesque shapes, riven like a man's broken heart; and the aged barrow on the cliff, about which the antiquarians had so long speculated—never, for want of money, being able to test their speculations—all these were unaltered. But the disillusion which struck at the very roots of a man's being, and the blow which struck at all his faith in human nature, and was in itself as the rending asunder of soul and body—other mortals besides Reginald Dene had had to bear such changes!

Why should I have been afraid he would utterly lose his self-control? Why should I have thought with horror of the agony of disappointment and shame corresponding to the intensity of the man's emotional nature, which would sweep like an electric current through his veins—inducing indignation, rage, and perhaps madness? I think now that I did wrongly to avert the blow. When we arrogate to ourselves the rôle of a little providence we generally fail. But the man was so young, so ardent, so absurdly sensitive, so capable of better things and of wider aims, that I had not the courage to destroy his happiness.

I trusted to the effect of a change of scene—of "widened horizons," as Jenny said—describing a little arc as it were in space, in her hopefulness about it, with her extended hands. We both of us no longer thought it desirable for this marriage to take place. But what if the flame which no one could have felt equal to extinguishing could only burn itself out by the force of circumstances and the introduction of new interests? I confess that we both of us plotted to that extent.

I felt more and more of a hypocrite when, working on Reginald's simplicity and strange unselfishness, I proposed that he should put all thoughts of his marriage aside for the present, and accompany Charlie in his proposed scamper to the Swiss

mountains. The disparity of years made it an easier matter for me to volunteer such advice, and touch the nerve of a conscience which was so abnormally susceptible.

"Permit me to say," I remember adding didactically, while I loathed myself for my dishonesty, "that you will have your wife always with you, your brother only for a few months. Life is exposed to all sorts of vicissitudes in the treacherous climate of India."

"Do you really think so, doctor? I never saw it in that light. Perhaps I ought not to let him go back," he said, with the quick colour burning on his cheek.

I reproached myself for overdoing it.

"Well," I resumed, "every one must be exposed to certain risks. Still Charles is not strong, and if you could take him off at once to the clear mountain air—he has just a few months left before he sails—it will be the kindest thing you can do for him—but mind, I say *at once*."

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III.

I HAD fancied that Barbara would be angry with me, and was more puzzled than ever when I met her in a little fir copse, looking perfectly lamblike, a few days after the brothers had gone. She kept a little aloof from me, as if afraid either of her own confidences or of what Miss Dalton had told me, and the remembrance of something uncomfortable had crimsoned her pretty cheeks. Still there was a look of relief in her face, a quiet self-possession about her, and above all such an appearance of splendid health as she held her eyes downcast, and as her smooth, clear complexion was thrown into vivid relief by the red-brown trunks and bluish foliage of the trees, that I was conscious of some surprise.

I contented myself with taking off my hat to her and moving out of the way, so as not to obstruct the path, but there was something in her straightforward dignity which made me feel somehow as if we had misjudged her, and owed her an apology. Certainly she was not fretting after Charlie Dene. It was a very good thing I had not carried the old lady's alarms to Reginald.

Just then I had enough to trouble about. The life of a doctor, especially if he cares for his fellow-creatures, is always an anxious and an exciting life. One lesson I had learnt—that it was always wiser to keep away as much as possible from a

family in which anything had gone wrong, and in which there was likely to be any sort of jarring discord or domestic discussion. One knows the sort of atmosphere, appreciable by the very servants, in which things are astir and uncomfortable, and the smaller the family may be the greater is the difficulty of keeping up appearance, joining in an easy *tête-à-tête* at meals, and settling down as if nothing had happened. Miss Dalton did not send for me again. I had not expected that she would, as she generally doctored herself with the old prescription, and I waited till things were smooth before I visited at the cottage.

Things were unusually smooth a month or two afterwards. I had been congratulating myself on the length of time which had elapsed without a death in my practice. The health of Halstead had been so unexceptionable that no ailment of any importance seemed to be heard of but hay-fever, and as that was an eminently respectable malady, attacking few but the so-called "upper classes," I had comparatively little to do. I had just been comforting the Hon. Mrs. Kempthorn by assuring her that gardeners and labourers and others in a humble condition of life had an immunity from the disorder, though inhaling pollen daily, and I remember how that lady seemed to lay the flattering unction to her soul that there was something highly aristocratic in sneezing, and that the nostrums, which were numerous, were especially applicable to a delicate constitution favourable to the ravages of summer catarrh! I left her lying on the sofa with her lace handkerchief, effervescing drinks, and expensive scents, assenting somewhat unwillingly to her exclusion of the summer breezes under the pretext of shutting out the pollenic spell, and I remember how I went back to Jenny, saying I might as well "put up the shutters," for I had but one or two patients left, and they were quite well. I was in spirits at the idea of a few days' rest for myself, when the sight of the daily newspaper completely put out of my thoughts any idea of taking a holiday.

Ah, well! It is not the only experience in my life, and I suppose in the lives of most men, of saying "Peace and safety," just when sudden destruction comes.

As I looked at the account of that horrible Swiss accident (it was at Zermatt, and the mountain, if my memory does not deceive me, was the Matterhorn), I could not see quite plainly. I had a feeling as if the letters floated before my eyes, and as if the room in which I was sitting, and next the whole house, were drifting away in a flood—further and further out to sea. I was obliged to gulp down a glass of wine, and even then to pinch myself to see if I was really awake. Yes, a rope or something

had broken; they were not clear, as I remembered afterwards, about the details. But the facts were clear enough. The sensational paragraph was headed, "Accident to two brothers," and was backed by a leader—you know the sort of thing. A lot of the usual commonplaces, peppered to suit the public taste, with a few pungent sayings about the foolhardiness of young Englishmen, the culpable negligence by which they threw away not only their own lives, but those of the innocent guides—it being completely kept out of sight that the guides are generally the most foolhardy; and then an allusion to glaciers, and apropos of them to Tyndall, with some scraps of scientific quotation, grandiloquent writing about Swiss scenery, and the complacent announcement of the probability that this was the precursor of at least a score of casualties. Oh! yes, one knows the sort of thing, and how every line of it must fall with a sort of cold thud on the hearts of the survivors! I remember thinking wildly how easy it was to prate about misfortunes, to write whole columns about them, and how difficult to meet them like a man. For one thing was perfectly clear—that the flippant, light-hearted, easy-going Charlie Dene was *dead*, called, it did not much matter how, either by an avalanche, a false step, or something that Reginald could not help—but anyhow called in a moment, "unhousel'd, unanel'd"—with all the sins with which I had been so ready to credit him on his head, to stand before the bar of his Maker. Yes, it was odd how I repeated that I was "sure Reginald could not help it." It was of course only stupidity on my part, but I knew how the elder brother, with his keen susceptibilities, would feel all the torture of such a disaster. To be the *one* man left alive after such a catastrophe, when his brother and two guides had been hurled into the depths, and when it was supposed that the breaking of the rope saved him, would be almost enough to make him abhor his own life!

It was I who, in consequence of Miss Dalton's urgent request, had to break the news in her presence to Barbara. I remember how, when the girl first comprehended there had been an accident, our worst fears were corroborated, because the first letters of a name escaped from her involuntarily, and that name was "Charlie!"—and how, when she saw us look with apprehension at each other, she gave a sharp, hysterical laugh, and her aunt said: "For heaven's sake don't let her laugh like *that*."

We so little knew the capabilities of her nature, or her curiously contradictory feelings, that we were both of us astonished when the look of horror and suspense passed away from her strained face, and she burst into a fit of natural

weeping, directly she knew that Reginald was safe. Women understand each other quickly in such sorrows as these. And, to my surprise, Miss Dalton asked for no confidences, and received none at first, but said to me the next morning :

"I have tried to be kind to her, but till now I have never appreciated her. I believe now that when I distrusted her she was acting for the best."

I nodded my head, for I too had begun to think that, though Barbara seldom reasoned about whether things were wrong or right, and acted from custom, rather on instinct than logical conviction, yet her instincts were mostly right. Whatever her business might have been with the dead man, she had thought it wisest to conduct it herself.

"I never told Reginald ; but oh ! his brother was not good, and that makes it so much more terrible that he should have died so suddenly," she said to me one day, when she sat white and motionless. The sweet softness of her face had gone, and there was something wildly impressive in her look when she stopped me in the answer I was about to make : "Oh, never mind that ; you were all quite wrong ; I am only so glad they did not quarrel, and that it was not as you thought."

From this time I understood why her grief was not poignant, and why she never gave way to the bewilderment of sorrow. All her thought was for Reginald, all her anxiety to comfort him. She seemed to know as well as I did that the horrors of death must have passed over him, and she was ready to catch at any suggestion for lightening the blow.

"I am bound not to be unreasonable," she said, with evident disappointment, when she heard that Reginald was remaining at Zermatt till the bodies should be found. Month after month passed by, and still the search was unsuccessful. Reginald wrote little. He seemed to be numbed with grief, as we had expected he would be. And on Barbara's part there were no more sallies of wilfulness. Her notes to him were full of pathos. While to her aunt she only admitted that she was more glad than ever that she had refused to make a breach between the brothers ; it would have been so greatly to be deplored.

Well, when the autumn was nearly over, Reginald wrote that his dismal duty had been done. At last the bodies had been found, and he had given them Christian burial. He did not say that they were in a state almost unrecognisable, and that the rope had been so fretted by the action of the weather as to throw no light on the cause of the disaster ; I read that in the newspapers.

IV.

I GUESSED by the colour in Barbara's cheeks that her heart had begun to pulse fast when she heard that Reginald was coming home. The terrible thing which had happened had changed her from a child into a pitying woman. And I knew, without being told, that she built great hopes on the tender reciprocity of that affection, which, for the first time, she was ready to show even to her ugly suitor.

It was a dull, November day when he came back. One of those sad days when the cold and damp seem to penetrate to your very bones, and when the scenery round Halstead had a way of looking like Ultima Thule, with the haggard moorland and gaunt cliffs fraternising with the sea and sky, till you could not tell where the land ended and the sky began. Directly I caught sight of Reginald's face, I saw there was a want of something in it which had been there before. He looked at us as if he were blind, with a fixed and meaningless gaze, and when I tried to rouse him by cheery questions, I felt as if I were rooted to the ground, so difficult was it to account for the change in his voice, and the new expression in his face. It was not that he was more ugly; most people would have said that he had improved in his looks. He had grown paler and thinner, and the features which had been so rough seemed to be more clearly cut.

I noticed that he turned from Barbara when she tried to comfort him, as if her soft, pitying eyes carried with them a sting of pain. So entirely had his manner altered that there seemed to be a certain cloud between them, a sort of veil which might have become like a wall of separation, if Barbara's aunt had not done her best to hasten the marriage. There was nothing to urge against Miss Dalton's argument that she had not long to live, and that she wished the ceremony to take place while she had strength to witness it. Her reasoning was simple, and there seemed to be no flaw in it at the time. Indeed, I hoped much from the marriage, as it seemed to me that the man required to be roused by some new form of excitement from the fatigue and mental weariness which was the result of a shock to his system.

But I knew afterwards that we had reasoned wrongly; for, as soon as the wedding tour was over, the bridegroom seemed to have relapsed into his former condition, avoiding the companionship of his wife, and wandering about restlessly for hours on the moors.

Barbara made excuses for him. It was evident, as she said, that he must have suffered terribly before he could have relapsed into such an incapable condition.

"It rests greatly with *you*. You can do so much more than any one else," I remember answering her one day, when she came to consult me about him. "This stupor is so often the result of a mental shock. So long as it lasts it is a kind of death in life, and a thousand times more terrible than any acute form of suffering. It is not even despair, for despair is life, but this is a slow, never-ending torture — we must shake him out of it."

I spoke to him even roughly.

"No man ought to be so stunned as to be purposeless," I said to him one day, "and you—as far as mere courage went—you used to have the courage of half-a-dozen men."

"Doctor, you know nothing about it," he answered, with a quick gesture. "Can you minister to a mind diseased, or raze out the written troubles of the brain?"

"You ought to make an effort," I repeated lamely, with a dim remembrance of the advice given by Mrs. Chick in "Dombey and Son," and wishing to recall my feeble words as soon as I had uttered them.

"That just proves," he said, "how little you *know*. How *can* you, when you have always led an easy, well-modulated life —when you have never had the wheels of thought going on maddeningly in your own brain, always dinning you with *one* recollection?"

And then he went on rather wildly to describe his nights of restlessness, and the feeling which came over him when he woke in the early morning, just before the dawn, when vitality is lowest, and when he seemed to be detached from the body, and to see himself and his own doings from a great distance, and how he wondered if it would ever be possible for him to take an interest in anything earthly again.

"I have married a wife," he said; "it was my duty to marry her. But I never could explain to her how it was a dead self that loved her with such intensity, and was inspired with such blessed hopes. I have already passed beyond her into another region of existence; I feel as if I were already judged."

"And you expect me to sympathise, as if this were not the utterest nonsense!" I said. "You must try change of air. You were always sensitive, and you are letting this sensitiveness grow upon you till it threatens to unfit you for the proper duties of life. And yet I used to think you one of the best fellows I ever knew."

I could not have made a more unfortunate speech. He seemed to shrink from the slightest word of praise or encouragement, as if from the touch of a finger on an open wound.

On the contrary, he began speaking in an excited way of his young wife, as of some celestial creature whom he had wronged and misunderstood, and whom he had no right to have married. He talked of her as if she were not only pure and good, but almost immaculate, and then—as if aware of his own want of self-control—tried to stop himself in his torrent of words.

A deep pause followed.

"Ah, Dr. Meredith, if you had only been with us!" he cried, after an interval, during which he had folded his hands on the table, and rested his head on them in an attitude of utter abandonment.

"What, at Zermatt?" I asked, a little heedlessly. And then, alarmed at the wild expression of his face, I added: "Try to put that remembrance out of your mind."

"Trying to put it out of my mind will not wash it off," he answered dejectedly. "Ah, doctor, you mean kindly, but you do not reason as a man who *knows*. No time can make any difference to me. I can never live without my grief. I don't wish to shake it off."

I knew it was of no use to repeat what I had said about an "effort." I began to have more hope in the soothing effect of bromides and sedatives, especially as he talked one day of the "lotus-eater's" dream, and said it would be the only Paradise for him.

At any rate, I could give him comfort for a time, though he alarmed me another day when he asked me if I remembered that miserable queen who had said that when she was dead they would find the name of a certain city, which had caused her much grief during her lifetime, engraved upon her heart.

"She was thinking," as he said, "of the body which is to decay—the mere shell of the spirit. But what must it be to have a memory branded on one's being for all eternity?"

"No, there is a better hope than that," I answered, scarcely knowing how to deal with this exaggerated sentiment.

"Yet, if there is to be individuality as well as continued existence, it is hard to see how one can forget. And the idea of a Lady Macbeth washing her little hands for ever and ever is an idea to haunt one!" he persisted, with a look in those eyes of his, which had such large pupils, not exactly comfortable.

I could not get him to try change of air, and was scarcely surprised when I was again sent for, and when the young wife,

with a look laden with prophetic woe, told me an alarming tale connected with watchful nights. For the first time I began to be afraid that there might indeed be some secret carefully kept from her by the man she had wedded. For Reginald not only walked in his sleep, but one of the worst facts of his sleep-walking was that he continually went out of his house to a dangerous part of his grounds, which were on a cultivated portion of the cliff, and communicated by a flight of wooden steps with the beach beneath. He not only muttered to himself uneasily and in a weird way, but he went through a sort of tragic pantomime at the very edge of the cliff, hanging over it in the dark, and seeming to be looking into the dimness as if he saw something. The servants were already whispering together and saying that the master was "beside hisself." I told the frightened wife that it did not amount to *that*, but that he would require watching. The pantomime which he performed in sleep was doubtless the recollection of the scene he had witnessed. I advised her to procure some competent person who should follow him in these dangerous walks, and be careful above all things not to wake him.

"It may be an effort of nature to relieve him from the unbearable pain of an imagination which was always over-sensitive," I said, as I gave those directions, speaking more hopefully than I felt.

But, when this state of things continued more alarmingly than before, I determined at last to risk speaking to the patient, and to get him to confide in me more fully than he had done. I said nothing about the sleep-walking, but enlarged on the importance of people having something definite to do, leaving them no choice either of pain or pleasure, especially, as I added, at times when the mind might be in danger of having an impression which was false fixed on it for ever.

I was aware of getting involved, and tried to explain.

"Pain should be as if it were not," I said, a little didactically. "When we cannot prevent it by one 'huge effort' of the will, we should overcome it without fighting against it—overcome it —I mean, by rising above it."

"Doctor, what are you driving at?" he asked, looking strangely at me. "There *may* be a pain which ennobles a man, even though it may cease to be a living pain, and become like mine a dead pain, the remembrance of which will go on for ever and ever, but that is not a remembrance *horrible*, *abominable*."

I did not stop him this time. I let him run on.

"Doctor, if you saw dreadful eyes looking at you and haunt-

ing you, and they say that when men are cut off before their time they *do* return and haunt you with the look which they had in their death-grip; and if—if you remembered that you had *cut the*—the——"

I did not understand what he meant. I did not know till long afterwards, though I noticed that he put a tragic emphasis on the sentence which he could not finish. I only reiterated my injunction that he should be carefully watched. I relieved my conscience by telling Barbara that he ought to be under restraint, and meanwhile repeated my hope that all would be well in time. An attendant of his own sex, who had been carefully recommended, was ordered never to lose sight of him, and I begged Barbara not to tie herself too continuously to a painful task.

"One day," as I said to her, "I hoped her husband would repay her for all the trouble he caused her."

She looked into my face to imbibe, if possible, some measure of hopefulness from me.

"Who will care about the trouble when it is over? *I* do not care about it now—he is always *so good to me*," the brave girl answered.

Meanwhile her husband seemed to grow no worse, but rather to improve. He spoke very little, and there was always that absent look in his face as of a man who was halting and hearkening to something in the past, but he made no complaint in the daytime. He never groaned over the strong mental pain which he had made up his mind to bear alone. It was only at nights, as his attendant told me, that he would often leave his room unconsciously, and go out on the cliff with his hands clasped one within the other, and his hair, which was turning gray, blowing in the wind—walking straight on with his head bent forward, turning neither to the right hand nor the left, always to the side of the cliff, and generally descending a few of the stairs. The oddest thing was that he would talk as if entreating pardon of some one, and as if he were longing himself to lie down and be with him in a place from which there would be no return. He would sometimes remain for a few minutes as if listening attentively, and then—consoled for a time—as if he had received an answer, he would creep back again to his house gently and sadly.

One day he surprised me by saying, a little abruptly: "Doctor, I have nothing the matter with me, and yet I *know* I shall soon die. I am glad that the conflict will soon be over, and when I am gone, you must tell Barbara to marry again; tell her it is better so—she has all her life before her, and it is

good for me to be freed from the anguish which conscience inflicts."

I looked upon this as a proof of his harmless delusions, yet, though he had shown no suicidal tendencies, I determined to be more than ever on my guard. I had thought it well to have a consultation on the case, and we began to think seriously of the need of a private asylum. And yet I am not sure up to the present time that the patient was mad. I cannot say that we had to reproach ourselves for anything wrong in the treatment. The one precaution which we did not take was in regard to a matter which we could not have foreseen. Nobody had been warned as to the unsafe condition of the wooden stairs which led from the cliff to the beach. And one terrible night when there was an unusual gale of wind, and when a silent figure muttering to itself was standing bareheaded on one of the steps, the feeble structure gave way. The attendant had followed, careful as usual not to awaken the sleeper. But everything was against him. A thunderstorm had been raging, and, when he approached the steps, the wind was so high that he could hear nothing but the sound of water and the beating of his own heart. It was too late for him to see anything. The steps had gone. It seemed unreasonable to blame him for carelessness. Indeed, I did not know whether to be sorrowful or not when I was called a few hours afterwards to the dying man, who had been so crushed by the fall as not to suffer much, though I could not help knowing that he would never speak again. He pressed my hand, looking upwards. I knew he meant to tell me that he was glad. And perhaps it was all the better that Barbara was away from home, and that the ordeal to which she had been subjected was at last played out.

He left her a rich young widow, and there was a legacy for me, and with it a sealed letter, which I was to deal with as I liked. It was headed his "Confession."

To the present day I am utterly unable to decide whether or not he was labouring under an hallucination when he wrote it. He described a certain evening when he and his brother Charles were sitting together at *table d'hôte* in the company of some merry acquaintances at Zermatt. They intended climbing in the morning, and the conversation almost naturally turned on the precautions which were to be adopted to prevent disaster. In the argument which ensued one of the company declared that lives might sometimes be saved if, when several men were falling, and when it was hopeless to right them, the precaution could be adopted of cutting the rope for the sake of others who were being uselessly dragged down. Charles Dene

joined energetically in the conversation, saying that under such circumstances he would certainly consider himself justified in cutting a rope.

On the following morning a violent quarrel took place between the brothers, in which Charles boasted of writing letters which had been received by Barbara, and declared that Reginald had been duped when he flattered himself she cared for him.

"*You know* that she cares for me, and that she would be my wife now, if I had not delayed our marriage, for the sake of seeing that *you* did not break your neck in Switzerland."

"The more fool you for always sacrificing yourself for other people," retorted Charles, beside himself with rage. "You are too great a mollycoddle even to take proper care of yourself."

The taunt had returned to the elder man's memory in a weak moment of madness, when, owing to a misadventure on the part of one of the guides (whom the young men had been foolish enough to take, although he had not been provided with the proper certificate), and partly also owing to the reckless conduct of Charles himself, Reginald found himself tied to three men whom it was utterly impossible for him to save, and who were dragging him into the abyss. He cut the rope in a moment, not knowing till afterwards what he had done, till, with lips parched, tongue dry, and with a horror as of eternal retribution, he came to himself, and but for the thought of Barbara, and the fear of heightening his offence by the sin of suicide, would have precipitated himself after the men who had fallen, and whose accusing eyes continued to haunt him for the rest of his life.

I cannot say how far I credited this tale. That a man who had been not only kind in aspect and courteous of speech, but unselfish in character and so tender to the feelings of others that he could not bear to give pain, even to an insect, should have loathed himself daily and hourly for the possession of such a secret, seemed to me credible enough. But that he should have *done* the thing of which he accused himself, seemed next to impossible. At any rate, he had been stricken down in his strength by the belief that he had done it, and he had wrestled with his own anguish till it was a comfort for me to know that at last he was free.

# ROBERT HENDON'S FAILURE

## I.

HERODOTUS speaks with wonder of a certain Persian who was in love with his own wife. I sometimes wonder if we have improved much through the ages. Certainly I once heard one of the more cynical of my medical brethren say that of all the most prolific causes of unhappiness that of unsympathetic marriage was the greatest. He went so far as to add that of the married people he knew not one couple in twenty could be said to be happy. He was a pessimist, as I told him. Much was accounted for by the fact that he was a man of great repute amongst a certain set in London, and was speaking of the fashionable world, to which the dignity of man and his spiritual nature, with mutual trust, endurance, and affection, must be too often a dream.

Yet though I, as a country doctor, tried to preserve my faith in that "inner temple" of the garden of Eden which, in the case of a happy marriage, may be said still to exist on earth, I too was often called upon to arbitrate in cases of domestic discord, and lamented the wretched consequences of a sudden yielding to emotional caprice, or to an attraction which could not be lasting in the choice of a wife.

In many cases which had begun wretchedly I found it possible, after a time, for people to live together with a measure of peace and even of cheerfulness; while there must have been numerous other cases of perfect happiness, of which I heard nothing, because the nature of married life is that the happiness is shut in, and not to be shared even with one's dearest friend. Rather than let me yield to my London friend's cynicism, Jenny

was ready with all sorts of these platitudes. But when the Hendons came to reside at Halstead we were both of us fairly puzzled at a case which set all my wife's cut-and-dried theories at defiance.

The world had already heard a good deal of Robert Hendon. He had taken high honours at Oxford, and had since made his mark on the literature of the age. He was a dreamer, an enthusiast, and yet a worker and a philanthropist. There was much excitement when it was first known that he had taken a little dovecot, surrounded by luxurious grounds, halfway between Halstead and Blackquay. It was understood that he was a dabbler in science and a lover of retirement. It was also said that he objected to the centralisation which threatened to make London the representative of English life and thought, as Paris had been of French. He declared there were too many clever people huddled together in London already, and that while they were stealing each other's ideas, they had no appreciation for each other. In all these opinions we heartily concurred; and there was a general purring of satisfaction among us when we learned that he reasoned so sensibly.

"And Mrs. Hendon, I hear, is quite as remarkable as her husband—altogether out of the common—quite a character," said Jenny, just at the time that we were in a flutter of gratification about the arrival of the new-comers.

I do not know that I ever quite relish it when I am told that a woman is a "character." But that, of course, may be old-fashioned prejudice.

"You can't expect us all to be of one uniform tint, like a Quaker bonnet," as my wife observed.

"Well, no, I suppose not," I said, with the pretence of a sigh, "especially as character is said to be dependent on cellular development."

"You always talk nonsense when you talk shop," my little woman observed, knowing that I was laughing at her. "You deserve to have a wife to nag at you till she drives you wild."

Nagging wives are always supposed to be the worst, and there was one good point at least about Mrs. Hendon. Her bitterest enemy could not accuse her of nagging. What she said was little enough, and that was solemn. She was narrow and yet had exalted ideas, a very curious combination of qualities. She was always looking out for what was wrong in other people, and yet intending to be kind, with a mixture of pride and condescension, and taking credit to herself for the little kindnesses which she somewhat gingerly eked out.

Robert Hendon was the last man to find married life, or

anything else, prosaic. I never knew a man who had an acuter intensity of feeling about him than he had. It was almost as if he possessed extra senses, besides those which are allotted to ordinary mortals, and could conceive of things which are inconceivable to the majority of human beings. His inability to make others understand his true meaning in ordinary conversation, often produced an appearance of combativeness which was rather tiresome at first sight, but it ceased to be tiresome when one understood the sweetness as well as the independence of his disposition. His wife *never* understood it, and it was a misfortune for him ever to begin an argument with her.

Both their faces impressed me at our first meeting. There was less strength in Hendon's than I had expected from reading his books. And there was an irregularity of feature about it which I learnt to like when I knew him better. But it was grand in its way and not incompatible with firmness as a whole. He was of high stature, and the blue eyes which looked full of thought and earnestness, out of the brown of the sunburnt skin—for he spent more hours in the open air than any other author I ever knew—were a revelation to me.

His wife's appearance surprised me. For of the two hers was by far the more strong and powerful face. She was of an age when the character rather than the mere physical beauty of a woman's face impresses you, and she looked formed to "warn, to counsel, and command," like one might have fancied Deborah —"a mother in Israel." I afterwards found that she had only one child, and I even came to think that the fact of her having no son was no very desperate misfortune for humanity. In saying this, I by no means intend to subscribe to that selfish worldliness which has led to the modern creed that it is better to be "without encumbrance," as if every fresh child born into the world is to be looked upon as an unnecessary burden. Nor do I mean to be hard upon Mrs. Hendon, who was always studious to be amiable to me, though I often wondered if she were sincerely genuine. I only think that, if she had had the arena of life more thoroughly to herself, it would have been better both for herself and for the ill-fated and imaginative man who had tied himself to her.

Once more his form rises before me with the light of genius in his face, which was full of generous impulses, and I think of the deeds of usefulness he might have accomplished, and lament that his career was so sadly abridged. He was one of the men who seem destined to lead happy lives, but who find inaction insupportable. He came to Halstead full of schemes for the public good, but his wife managed to throw cold water on them

all. There was something quaint and rather inexplicable about her stiffness, as she took the hands of his friends gingerly in hers, not touching more than a couple of their fingers if she could help it, as if she mistrusted every one before she came to know them, and stood on her guard against them, for fear they should exercise some malevolent influence.

"Doctor, you will come and dine with me whenever you are passing our way, and have not time to return home for your dinner," Hendon said, soon after his arrival. And it was at one of these little family dinners that I found out how the husband and wife disagreed about nearly everything, though they equally managed to steer clear of Mrs. Grundy.

Hendon expounded some new theories of his; they were rather far-fetched ones. But there was a fascination in the way he stated them. I recollect now the habit which he had, when excited, of tossing back his hair with his hand from his forehead. His eyes were the only portion of his face which was really handsome, and they reminded me, when they shone with enthusiasm, of the portraits of Shelley. I remember I thought that he was not very logical. For in spite of the high greatness which hung over his world—a greatness which was actually the ever present greatness of the Infinite—he seemed scarcely to be aware that his theories rather tended to the dogmatism of negation.

I was longing to argue with him that such a Nature as he depicted would be nothing more than a vast automaton, and that man himself could not logically be detached from it.

I should have said something of the kind if, looking at his wife, I had not seen an expression, half of amusement, half of bitter scorn in her face. In a moment I seemed to have the key of the whole domestic situation.

"You will startle Dr. Meredith," she said, languidly rising, and speaking with an *ex cathedrâ* air, as if she was perfectly acquainted with her subject. "I wish you would not originate such wild ideas."

"I originate them!" he said, laughing, "I can't say *I* originate anything. For every discovery there are claimants —isn't it so, doctor, in your profession? I don't believe in originating anything. But the fact is, thoughts are in the air, and there is a sort of parallelism to be expected in contemporary thought. I have no doubt that we credit Chaucer and even Shakespeare with an amount of subtle meaning which never occurred to those worthies, and a lot of knowledge which they never even dreamt of. How much more an ordinary man like myself!"

"You know that is not what I mean," she said, looking steadily at him. "If I mistake not, Dr. Meredith is more accustomed to exact modes of thought, and does not play fast and loose with all the problems in the universe."

Then, with a look at me, as if to say, "We two understand each other. I am sure you will make excuses for this hot-headed child," she retired, sweeping her draperies after her.

The episode was too uncomfortable to be easily covered, and I noticed that when she had gone he became wilder in his paradoxes, his laughter, and his brilliant talk, pouring out glass after glass of wine and tossing them off in a way which made one fear for him ; especially as, for the first time, I noticed a strain of melancholy which is usually, anomalous as it may seem, inseparable from such gaiety.

"Women mean well, and my wife is one of the best of them, but they are fond of talking their murderous platitudes," was the only allusion he made to what she had said.

When we went up into the drawing-room, we found that the lady had left a message for us. She had retired to the nursery, and did not suppose that we would want her again that night.

I noticed that Robert Hendon winced when the message was given. It was not that he was without admiration for his wife's domestic qualities, but that parade of any sort was naturally distasteful to him. It was the same with religion. If any man served his Master by treasuring up serious questions, reading and meditating on them, that man was Robert Hendon, and if any one cherished that ideal of purity without which earth can never be near to heaven, I should say again it was he. I noticed that, whatever might be his bewilderment, as he evolved truth after truth for himself in the region of science, he was always determined to retain his belief in a spiritual world. But he hated anything that was pharisaical, and was not quick at uttering what he called "shibboleths." He began to talk with excessive rapidity when we were left alone that night, and I took my departure early.

It was not much later than nine o'clock, and I remember how the aspect of Halstead on that midsummer evening, with its quiet sea-scape, its old-fashioned long street, its breezy eminences, and its shingly beach, with the fishing-boats drawn up near the net-houses, struck me as singularly peaceful. There could not be a more retired spot for all the charms of home-life for families which had resources of their own to fall back upon, or for the summer visitors who liked sea-bathing, and wished, like Mrs. Gamp, to bring their "constitootions up with shrimps." But, however weary Robert Hendon might have been of the

fatigues of a great city, I doubted if he had done wisely to come to Halstead. The odd smile which had mocked him, and which he had been quick to perceive, and the strange words of disapproval which had been uttered to his discomfort, dwelt uncomfortably in my memory. And I doubted if the continual rubs to which he was evidently subjected in his every-day life would not be more keenly felt in retirement than in a busier place.

As time went on my fears seemed to be realised. It could not be said that the Hendons actually quarrelled, or made themselves in any way the talk of the neighbourhood. Mrs. Hendon, as Jenny reminded me, was as old as her husband, and her affection could not be expected to take the form of young love, with its restless solicitude. She did not trouble herself much to interfere with Hendon. But their tastes were diametrically opposed. His mind moved, whilst hers was anchored. A very little thing, a chance word or look, would open a keen observer's perception of the dividing gulf between them.

If Margaret Hendon had ever really cared for her husband, the fire had quickly died out. It was of no use for me to speculate, trying to account for the fact that people who held such different opinions should ever have married—a fact for which they could not probably have accounted themselves. Pity the woman gave him in unstinted quantity, but the pity had curdled the tenderness, if indeed the latter quality had ever existed.

In a little while Robert Hendon was very popular at Halstead. His coming among us was felt to be a distinct gain, and his institution of a night-school during the winter months for the lads who were employed in summer; his setting on foot a series of lectures, in which several of his London friends came down to help him; his establishment of an art-studio for those who took an interest in drawing—were all so many new centres of activity in which he found a vent for the overflowing of his superabundant energy.

And then suddenly his popularity waned. Folks seemed to fight shy of him. The very people who had invited him to their dinners, and whose innate conservative feelings might have been supposed to be tried by Robert Hendon's determination to bring forward those new truths which were struggling feebly for a desolate existence, had borne with him hitherto. But now they seemed suddenly to have found out that he was dangerous—a lunatic, an impostor. The clergyman, good, charitable man as he was, was the first to fight shy of him. And then came the squire, whose territorial influence, whose

parks and game preserves, had been pronounced by Mr. Hendon to be abuses to be swept away.

"He could not expect them to like it," said Margaret, with one of those curious flickering smiles which had a little contempt in them, and which would occasionally flit across her features when her husband expressed his thoughts, and when sometimes I had noticed her listening with compressed lips, but abstaining from joining in the talk lest she should make him seem weak and contemptible. "We all know that Robert's political opinions are decidedly wild. He thinks that wealth should be equally distributed, and that all the large houses in this neighbourhood should be shut up, the servants discharged, and the parks let out in allotments."

"Never mind," answered some one, laughing. "We have not too many Quixotes. It is pretty to see Mr. Hendon mounting his Rosinante, and setting out to demolish windmills."

The sudden coldness of our kind-hearted rector seemed to be more difficult to comprehend. He no longer welcomed Hendon's assistance at the night-school, though it had pleased him at first; he discouraged his parishioners in taking tickets for his literary and scientific lectures; he even hemmed-and-hawed, and declared that there were pitfalls connected with all these things in some mysterious way.

Hendon became depressed. Then it was that they sent for me, and I found it useless to ignore the cause of his depression. It was better to go to the root of it, and I thought it wisest to speak to the wife, who told me that "she had a perfect contempt for that idiotic style of woman who allowed her own identity to be merged into that of her husband, and who gave way to all his crazes."

"I have my own opinions," she said defiantly, "and I doubt if it is wise, when my husband is so full of raw theories and unorthodox ideas, for him to be thrown into close contact with uneducated young men."

"Phew!" I said to myself, drawing a long breath, and knowing that, if they disagreed in opinion, it was often owing to her unwise attempts to explain the inexplicable, "then it is worse than I thought." If these were the outlying pickets of the fiercer currents, how terrible must have been the intercourse between herself and a man so acutely sensitive that sympathetic interchanges of feeling seemed to act on his nervous system like electricity.

"What a pity!" I remarked, speaking as much to myself as to her, "that love and truth seem sometimes to lose all connection with the name of religion."

She coloured to the roots of her hair, and looked severely at me. But I could not help adding :

"I expect many of us if we get to a better world will be greatly surprised at the people we shall meet there."

"I do not know what you mean," she answered languidly and proudly. "I can't turn myself into a sort of chameleon to suit the ideas of the present day."

The sharpness and bitterness of the repartee made me feel how utterly futile it was to continue the conversation. I only answered that it was no business of mine to inquire at all into the different shades of colour of other people's opinions ; but I deplored the dogmatic hardness which so often alienated those who were only seeking for truth.

My distress was greatly increased by the fact that worry and work were beginning to have a serious effect upon my patient's health. The work alone might not have injured him, though he was writing another book, and did all such writing so conscientiously as to put an excessive strain both on brain and nerve. But the worry was already causing sleeplessness, an ailment which in his case invariably induced an excessive amount of constitutional depression. I tried my very best to make him understand that I put no faith in chloral, which had just then come into fashion, or bromides, or opium, or indeed in any of the poisonous narcotics which produce the semblance of sleep ; and yet I had already a suspicion that he drugged himself with them privately, to overcome the exhaustion produced by constant altercations with his wife.

"Doctor, you don't understand," he said to me irritably ; "I *must* work and I must sleep. It is of no use for you to deny me. Surely those privileges are the common rights of mortals."

"It is for that very reason I wish you to rest for a time, that your brain may be rejuvenated. It is as clear as it can possibly be that if your work during the day has not been excessive or too fatiguing, during the night's sleep your brain would be able to reconstruct all that had been injured."

I even tried to make him smile by entering into a learned explanation. If I could only make him comprehend that every thought involved the death of a number of protoplastic molecules, and that these molecules could not be replaced when the process of nutrition was interfered with, I hoped that my words would have some effect.

"*Rest!*" he answered, with a bitter laugh, "that shows how little you understand my condition. It is just when I try to rest that I am so worried by the gnat-bites of existence. I am a fool

to mind the gnats. But as soon as my mind is occupied I am able to shake them off."

"It seems to me," I said smilingly, "that there may be another form of rest for you, which consists in a change of posture, a new sort of employment, better than this constant spinning of your brains."

And as if my prophecy was to be fulfilled, I found him animated as if he had taken a fresh lease of life the next time I visited him. The little town of Blackquay thought a good deal of the privilege of sending a member to Parliament, and as the seat was vacant just then by a resignation on the score of illness, a deputation had waited on Hendon to ask him to stand as the Liberal candidate. If too much electricity in the atmosphere, as some eccentric person once said, be the cause of political commotion and of new impulses to thought, there must have been a good deal about just then. It was possible that Robert Hendon had something to do with this stir of thought. But at any rate some of the Blackquay men were very much in earnest. The very causes which had made Robert Hendon unpopular with a few of the squires in the neighbourhood of Halstead had no doubt served to attract for him favourable attention from other quarters. The younger Radicals at Blackquay were eager about new questions which resolved themselves into a few simple propositions. That the property which every man had in his own labour ought to be sacred and inviolable; that the welfare of the community must not be endangered by legislating for a class against the people, and that the all-important subject of the day was the condition of the manufacturing and agricultural labourers—these were questions eagerly discussed in connection with the approaching election.

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II

ROBERT HENDON was evidently gratified at the compliment which had been paid to him. His enthusiasm was already roused. But all depended on his wife. I was informed that her property was settled on herself, and that if she refused the necessary funds he could not accept the offer. But to my astonishment Mrs. Hendon for the first time showed ambition. She had somehow conceived a sort of prejudice to her husband's literary work, but was not at this time sufficiently conversant with politics to dread the new causes for collision, which I knew to be imminent.

"He is the sort of man who will go through life with the reputation of being clever, and of saying astonishing things without doing anything remarkable, unless he gets into the House, and then he will find his level. I don't want him to be always spoken of as a rising man," she explained to me, "hidden in a sort of literary seclusion."

Her speeches made him wince, especially when she dilated in his presence on the fact that his friends who were with him at the University had never dreamt of shutting themselves up. One was a well-known barrister, another a master of a public school, and so forth.

"When men run a race, it is hard to tell which will come to the front," I said in haste; while Hendon added excitedly something about never courting popular favour, and that to teach men from week to week, or from month to month, in current books or newspapers was to exercise a wider influence even than that of the pulpit.

I doubt if she heard his speech, but there was earnest resolve in her dark eyes, and she spoke rapidly, breathlessly, watching his face to catch the first symptom of acquiescence, for there was not much time for hesitation.

"If Dr. Meredith thinks that your health will be fit for it, you should lose no time in letting them know. There is one thing I feel hopeful about, that you will remember the present state of popular discontent, and *not* inflame the poorer classes by ideas which are——"

I looked at my patient, whose eyes were already burning like live coals, whose lips were very white, and who was beginning already to thunder.

"I will promise *nothing*."

Hastening to avert the storm which was certain to arise in connection with the old grievance, I quoted rapidly:

"'The man who never alters his opinions is like standing water, and breeds reptiles of the mind.' I will answer for it, Mrs. Hendon, that your husband will sail with the wind—so far," I added, with a sly aside, "as sailing means sailing, and not drifting with the current, for then we may shift sometimes against the wind, though sometimes we seem to go with it."

"If I am not so moderate as you wish, Madge, it will be because I can't help it," answered Hendon, with a return of his usual good humour; "any more than a well-known poet who would jokingly declare that he could not help being Republican on account of the shape of his forehead."

I fear she thought we were laughing at her, for she withdrew

into her shell. There were no more generous forecastings of success.

"We don't expect women to trouble about such things," added Hendon, with unfortunate want of tact.

"No," she said satirically. "I know you are apt to trust to your more spacious intellects."

It was not a good beginning, and I, who hoped that a new strand of sympathy might now be woven between them, was already alarmed at the look-out. For every man of real genius exercises dominion unconsciously from his youth upwards, and stamps his character and thoughts on a whole company of admirers, and Robert Hendon was no exception to the rule. The young men whom he had taught at Halstead, and the artisans whom he now harangued at Blackquay, could no more help thinking as he thought than clear water can help reflecting the stones and grass above it.

It was the "voice of the people" as well as the voice of Robert Hendon which in a short time was deploring the abject pauperism of the working classes.

"Think of the human swarms which pour into the fetid workrooms, and tramp back into their wretched garrets—their squalor and their misery—and then of the masters who are wheeled home in their carriages to their luxurious palaces. Let the millionaires take care of themselves! I will vote for the repeal of the taxes levied on the great body of the people. I will advocate the cause of the agricultural labourer, whose rate of wages has no more connection with the price of food than the size of one of the distant planets. Let the artisan be a free agent, or danger will come from the manufacturing districts, where there are too many destitute hands, as well as in the agricultural! Let wages be given fairly, and not doled out as alms. Let us not *pretend* to give charity, while the richer classes are faring sumptuously, and doling out the crusts of starvation to the widows and orphans concealing their sobs and hiding their tears in the fever dens of a great city! It is impossible for me now to do more than touch on the skirts of a great question—the disease of a civilisation which is slowly undermining it, and bringing it into a disrepute worse than savagery. I have no time to advocate abstractions, but the simple principles of justice and mercy which should be burnt into the heart of every man and boy among us, and without which the institutions of a free country, of which we are justly proud, will vanish like so much chaff before the wind."

Some such words as these were reported as uttered by Robert Hendon in one of the Blackquay newspapers, and,

allowing for the possible inaccuracies of a reporter, I have no doubt that he did utter them, or some very much like them.

In Margaret Hendon's mind they were the absurdities of a stump-orator, and as such intolerable and offensive to a degree.

"How can you hope to make the people loyal and contented if you inflame them like this?" she asked indignantly.

He only answered that there was such a thing as a noble discontent, and when she continued, more indignantly, "This inflammatory stuff has led to revolutions before now," he only shook his head and muttered something about the "human culture of the poor wretches being so deficient, that in many cases they had no conception of what should be done." He was thinking out a thought of his own—a way he had from being often steeped in a sort of habit of, or atmosphere of, continual thought. But she misunderstood him as usual, and went away with the impression that he was apologising for crime.

A few days after this, Mrs. Hendon came to visit Jenny, and my wife—who had genuine humour, though she did her best to please the lady—gave me a not uncomic account of the interview.

"I wish I had had nothing to do with it," said the aggrieved woman. "I have never been accustomed to be mixed up with what is not gentlemanly or respectable."

Jenny went on with her sewing. It was her way when visitors sat with her for any time. She would make the excuse that she could talk all the better when her fingers were occupied. But on this occasion she said nothing, and her visitor sat surveying the old faded carpet with ghostly suggestions of former colour which had to serve us at that time.

After a long pause, Margaret said, with a sigh:

"I hear that he is patrolling the streets, with working men for his attendant henchmen, and that few of the gentlemen are ever seen with him, and yet he refuses to let me canvass. He says it is like getting these uneducated fellows to sell their votes, just to go and be polite to them. *I* call it ridiculous."

"Well, it is being on the right side to avoid anything dishonourable," said Jenny, with a passing shaft, "and I feel quite sure that your husband is pretty safe to be elected."

The fact was that, with his accustomed singlemindedness, and conscientious objection to trying to scheme for a certain result, Robert Hendon was almost forgetting his own chances of success in the opportunity which he welcomed of showing sympathy with labouring men. But just as his wife had been unable to comprehend his real veneration for sacred things, because he could not utter every one of her shibboleths, so she

did not now see how it would be his one object in entering Parliament to try to diminish the heavy burdens under which other men groaned. Alas! she only saw, or fancied she saw, a disease clinging fast to Robert himself, like the poisoned shirt of Nessus, which was slowly and surely devouring him. Some paradoxical words of his were reported wrongly to her. She did not inquire if they were exaggerated, but she shrank away appalled from his tainted individuality.

Her heart was in hot revolt with anger and shame—emotions which, at her age, were certain to rend and tear in such a way as to enfeeble her bodily condition—when she said to him one day, in dread and loathing of her own position :

"You must make up your mind to face the truth. If this election were being conducted like any others of which I have heard—it would be quite another thing—but I utterly refuse to be mixed up with what is seditious."

Her husband looked at her with an expression which was not unusual to him, but which she had never learned to comprehend. He was reading a newspaper which some busybody had sent him, and which contained a curiously untruthful attack on himself. He had not cared for the slander, but he was indignant at his wife's words. This was being driven into a dangerous corner, and he was immediately on the alert.

"I have no intention of diverging from my position for the sake of"—he stopped ; he was going to say "shriekers," but he changed it for "alarmists"—"for the sake of alarmists, who take signposts for ghosts, raise a pitiable cackle about nothing, and pretend to look into my private affairs with inquisitorial minuteness."

"Then you intend to take no more notice of *that* article than my remonstrances?"

For she also had read the paper, and as she asked the question her nostrils were a little dilated, and there was a glittering light in her dark eyes.

The shade of contempt had died from his face. He cut out the piece of print with scissors, rose, and folded it into a book, which was labelled "Blackquay News" on one side, and on the other "Newcliffe Journal," and contained various disquisitions relating to the approaching contest, ready to be pasted in when he should have leisure.

Then he said :

"I like being compared to a fox with a firebrand at my tail. It is a comparison which might have pleased Darwin. But I like it for another cause. The foxes ravaged the Philistines'

fields. Now, if there is one thing I detest, it is this modern Philistinism."

"You have called me a Philistine before; I do not quite see the gist of it," she answered, as the dints in her nostrils grew deeper, and angry red spots burnt on her cheeks. "I should like you to keep to the point; that is no answer to my question. I should like to know whether you mean to take notice of that article?"

He looked at her steadily, and said, speaking slowly:

"If you are riding on horseback, and try to get your horse slowly and carefully over a little stream of muddy water, you will be sure to be splashed, but let him leap over it boldly, clearing it at one bound, and he will escape without a spot."

It was late one night during that week when I received such an urgent summons to call on Robert Hendon very early the next morning, that I hastened to obey it as soon as possible after sunrise. What a morning it was! The summer was nearly over, so that the wild cry of the missel-thrush, with the pert song of the chaffinch and the piping tones of the rollicking blackbird, with all the other medley of sounds in which Robert Hendon had delighted, were no longer, as on the midsummer evening, to be heard in his garden. During the night there had been sharp, heavy showers of rain, and now there were dashes of blue between the clouds. Over the distant moors was a curtain of gray mist, but the bold outline of the nearer cliffs were still to be seen rising grandly over the sea. It seemed to me that the very garden was more neglected, and the walks less well kept, as Hendon—who was out already—guided me into a little plot of adjacent underwood which he had nicknamed the "Wilderness."

I noticed immediately not only the change in his face, with a singular wildness in his large eyes, but an alteration in his manner and walk, as he led me to a seat. His happy, lounging gait had altered, and he struck with his stick impatiently at the thistles. Anxious thoughts and passionate expressions seemed to chase themselves rapidly over a face which, though by no means classically regular, had the power of reflecting them like a mirror.

"We shall not be interrupted here," he said shortly, as we seated ourselves. "I have sent for you as the only friend I can venture to consult. Some interfering fool has thought it necessary to send me that letter."

He hesitated, holding a letter, which I was equally unwilling to take, for I saw it was in the handwriting of his wife. He

who so seldom unburdened himself was offering to let me read it, but I knew that he was characteristically impetuous, and that his heart was hot within him at the memory of his wrongs.

My uneasiness was rather increased than lessened when he unexpectedly threw himself back into the seat when he recognised my scruples, and laughed—positively laughed—with a vehemence more resonant than musical. I have known women give vent to that sort of ghastly laughter on occasions when their feelings have been strongly moved, and—if in their case the false merriment is not always hysterical—it is, at any rate, a reflex action of the nervous system, which one is apt to consider especially feminine. Well, Robert Hendon had little of the feminine about him, except that he was so sensitive to change in the social atmosphere as to be almost like a thermometer, and so keenly alive to those niceties of thought and feeling which it generally takes a woman to detect. I have no doubt he suffered a hundred times more than an average man would have suffered in his case.

I am afraid I uttered an impatient groan. "What was I to do?" The body is easily affected by violent emotions of any sort, and it is our business to render such medical aid as may be necessary in such cases. It might be consistent with proper dignity to occupy a sort of judicial position, but never to take sides in a family contest, or to descend to any knowledge of social facts that might be imparted to us under circumstances which were humiliating. I have no doubt that he read all this which was passing in my mind, and even credited me with finer feelings than I had on the subject. For he instinctively crumpled up the letter in his hand, while it seemed to be necessary for him to relieve himself by that uncanny laughter.

"Excuse me, doctor," he said presently, while I looked at him perplexed and dismayed. "I ought to have told you that I have been the victim of several overpowering impulses, and that, amongst others, I have always felt myself irresistibly compelled to laugh on occasions of peculiar solemnity. Was it Scarron or Sir Thomas More who died laughing? My own belief is that the story is too good about More—he could scarcely have laughed in the process of decapitation. And then there was Heine—what a fellow he was to laugh!—even when, as he said, he had toothache in his heart. *That* is a terrible malady, as I know by my own experience—perhaps you are cleverer than Heine's doctors, and can recommend some newer stopping or tooth-powder to stop it. Meanwhile, I have to try his clever German plan—let us think of merriment

and masked balls to turn our thoughts—lalarallala—lalaral—la—la."

I knew that all this nonsense and pretence at singing was to lessen the effect of his want of self-control. So I said nothing, and waited till he continued, with an evident effort:

"Now *this* is an occasion of peculiar solemnity. You must know that my wife, from the highest motives, no doubt, has arrogated to herself the part of a little providence. She has thought it necessary to pen an epistle of awful gravity to warn some people of importance against *me*, and it is the deed of one who calls herself her friend to return my wife's letter to the person whom it concerns, and to tell me—anonymously—how deeply she is grieved to let me know that this unfortunate interference will be likely—in fact—to lose me this election."

He spoke now in his accustomed tones, as if determined not to show his depression if he felt it, and I—who had always known the profound difference of opinion between himself and the woman he had married—could only repeat like an idiot:

"It is very serious—very worrying."

"Very worrying indeed, doctor, not only to myself, but to my supporters. Affairs seem to have taken a turn which one could not exactly have expected. To be educated by experience they say is the very thing for a man. Not to speculate, not to dream, but to go on with my work unwearied in an age in which men are tempted to hollow superficiality—*that* has been my programme for myself. My wife, meanwhile, has claimed the monopoly of everything right and proper, like the Roman Church. Hers is the singular privilege reserved for the few, of never conceiving even the possibility of being mistaken in anything—while I, alas, poor wretch, 'sails rent and compass lost,' with what suspicion she must look down on me! Doctor, I could not sleep before, and now it seems to me that this epistle has murdered sleep."

I did not like this talking in a rambling way about himself, especially as I was aware of the sensitiveness which, whether he attempted to hide it or not, electrified the man, soul and nerve. I knew that his wife's letter had galled him to the quick, and though I attempted to make excuses for it, saying that I was sure she did not mean to do anything that would really be hard or cruel, I saw that my words did not touch his trouble. It was the *friends* who were standing by him of whom he was thinking, and it is probable that Mrs. Hendon had never even thought of these friends.

When there is gunpowder always waiting for explosion, there is little to be done to avert a catastrophe. I could not speak

of this confidence to Mrs. Hendon, or betray my acquaintance with the circumstances which I thought so unfortunate. Still less could I obtrude myself to give advice, but I tried remonstrating in a feeble way, and was accused of illogical conclusions.

"When I think people are wrong I always speak out," said Margaret Hendon, in tones which were a little more dry and vibrating than usual, "I never find fault unless they deserve it."

"It is not always easy to measure other people's deserts. Why shouldn't others aim at what they think to be reformation, if not exactly in *our* way?" I asked ambiguously. But Mrs. Hendon only looked painfully distressed, as if she, on her part, had received a chill which stiffened her with a little extra frost.

She did not understand my allusions, and I—well, after all, it was not possible for me to launch into disquisitions on subjects on which every man does not find it easy to speak.

I did no good with my vague hints, and meanwhile Robert Hendon had the pain of a wound, which for a time might be numbed by mental chloroform, but which would constantly return upon him through the whole of his future life. He asked me to be with him as much as possible till the election was over, and I, who feared that he was indulging a little too freely in alcohol, and that the opium against which I had warned him was beginning to do its work, tried to humour him in his request.

That Mrs. Hendon was not happy it required no wit to discover. Her usual facile resources for making the time pass rapidly seemed all to be exhausted. She could not read, could not work, but was evidently restless.

"If she makes the tea, it is not drinkable," my poor friend said to me, with another of those laughs which I did not like. And so we brewed the decoction privately for ourselves, and I put the sherry out of the way whenever I saw it about.

It seemed to me that Mrs. Hendon was meditating some tactics which would be more effective. She had the talent of a general, and, in the strategic skill of the battlefield, I would have matched her brains any day against those of her husband. There was little talk between the two whenever I was present. Each seemed afraid of compromising dignity. But there were times when Margaret Hendon's voice would be suddenly raised to concert pitch, and when she called her position an odious one, as if she were lamenting a sudden dethroning from her social status.

"It is so hard for me that Robert should always take the wrong side. I have endured it too long, but I have despised myself," she said to me one day.

I could hardly think what she had had to endure, but I knew now that tolerance of circumstance seemed to her impossible, or only compatible with qualms of conscience, as to whether such tolerance was wicked. Information often comes strangely to doctors, and I was scarcely surprised when I was one day informed of the true explanation of our good rector's coldness; how it was Mrs. Hendon, who had thought it necessary to call privately on the clergyman, and infect him with her own suspicions respecting the teaching of her husband. There was no niche in her mind into which any of the theories that had a fascination for Robert could fit, and, being entirely deficient in humour, she was often perfectly unable to form any conception of his talk but that which necessarily resulted in grotesque caricature.

I might deplore all this, but I was utterly unable to remedy it. As Mr. Hendon herself remarked with all due solemnity, the days had passed when women could be no longer consulted, but were "railed off," as it were, from men. She had no idea of being penned up like one of a flock of sheep, and assured me that a higher morality would be promoted as soon as women had more scope and political freedom.

I did not venture to deny her assertion, knowing that Jenny was of the same opinion. But it did occur to me that this "political freedom" would be hastened when there were fewer women of the didactic type of Margaret Hendon.

Robert did not interfere with her in the least, and left her absolute mistress of the situation even when she thought proper to drive about Blackquay without wearing his colours. She knew better than to affect the colours of his rival, and the black velvet costume suited her severe style of beauty. She looked like an empress in it when I met her one day. But I noticed that her hand shook and that she laughed somewhat nervously.

"Well, what are you looking at?" she asked, a little sharply. "You see I am driven to wear black; neutral tints never suit me, and it is best for people once for all to understand that I refuse to take any part in these outrageous schemes of Robert's."

That reserve of strong power over himself, in spite of his peculiar sensibility, which rarely failed Robert at that time, even in the most trying emergencies, came to his assistance as he reminded her after this that their interests were identical, and of the need in such a case for self-respect.

"My self-respect!" she responded bitterly. "I wonder to hear such a great word from your lips. I think it is *I* who have

a right to be surprised at the little respect you have been showing to my views—tolerance to other people's opinions cannot be all on one side."

"My wife! my wife!" he said, in a low, sad tone, which ever in altercation was a little broken and piteous, "think of the years we may have to pass together; we must accommodate our ways to each other."

"Why don't *you* think of them, and try to be tolerant on your own side?" she answered defiantly. "It is strange that you should think me animated by some hostile feeling to you because I cannot agree with you. You had better have married some pretty little ignoramus in the bread-and-butter stage, fresh from the nursery."

Then for the first time he began to say to me, about some of the plans he thought it necessary to adopt, "I hardly think it necessary to tell *her*," or "It is better perhaps *she* should not know."

This device might have been all very well, but that unfortunately, hers was not only the stronger nature, but she likewise possessed a power which the man could not afford to set at naught—the power of wealth. To attempt to outwit Margaret Hendon was, to say the least of it, a mistake. Any other subjection of womanhood but that which comes from the woman herself—when, in the melting and softening of a nature developed by love, the woman becomes not only the guardian and the helper, but is ready to subject all selfish interests, and to live for the good of those whom she loves—is likely to bring its own punishment. Such a method as that which Robert Hendon had been driven into trying was only calculated to curdle all that might have been love in his wife, leaving her with the desire to stab and wound.

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## III.

I HAD little time to take part in political contests, and amusing as it was to find so many little people suddenly riding the high horse, and so many others of the supposed great ones stooping to contemptible expedients for the sake of securing a vote, I could not help wishing that the polling-day was over. I should not have dreamt of going near the political platform from which Robert Hendon had to harangue the people, had I not been sent for hastily one morning. The hall was so crowded with the folk who had braved bad air and heat to hear the "dema-

gogue," as his enemies called him, speak, that policemen had to clear the way for me before I could approach the daïs which had been erected for the speakers. It was fortunate that barriers had been raised to prevent the swaying of the crowd, or I could not have reached it at all. But I made vehement efforts to do so, in spite of pushing and scuffling. For Robert Hendon sorely needed me. He was said to have addressed the crowd with greater eloquence than usual, and then the moment he resumed his seat it was noticed that he took repeated draughts of the cold water which stood in a tumbler on the table, after which his head fell backwards, and it was found that he was unconscious. Beads of cold perspiration stood on his forehead, caused by the efforts which he had made during his long-continued speech, and when I saw him he gave no signs of recovery from the collapse. His state was an alarming one, and the proceedings on the platform were arrested, while he was borne to an adjacent room, and the usual means were resorted to for restoring animation. I cleared the room of curious intruders. And when at last I was rewarded by the return of his sensibility, I suspected from the wildness of his manner, and the incoherency of his speech, that the attack had been caused by something worse than physical collapse.

"Doctor, I am a disgraced man," he said, drawing more papers from his pocket. "If you were to do me a real kindness, you would give me a stupefying drug which would put me asleep for ever."

"Nonsense," I said, trying to speak jauntily, while I looked at the papers. "No man can be disgraced, except by his own act."

The first papers were letters—business letters, in Margaret Hendon's handwriting, addressed to various tradespeople. I confess that their contents fairly stupefied me. To think that she could write in that firm caligraphy, and refuse to be responsible for her husband's debts—the expenses which he had necessarily encountered in allowing himself to be nominated as Liberal candidate for Blackquay—it did not seem to be credible! The other paper was an article cut from some country newspaper containing a violent attack upon the dishonesty and hypocrisy of Robert Hendon, in offering himself in a state of impecuniosity and defrauding honest tradesmen while he pretended to defend the rights of the people.

"You see, the fellow who wrote that article is quite in the right of it. The facts are inexorable; no amount of talking can ever explain them away."

He spoke in a dreamy fashion, not very much to the point, and I was out of all patience with him. I would rather have

seen the healthy reaction—the "backward rush" of indignant contempt against the woman who could treat him in this fashion—than have him take it helplessly as he did. I was more than ever strengthened in a conviction of my own that great powers of mind too often imply corresponding weakness in an opposite direction; that all highly intellectual men are exposed to dangers which threaten them when the pendulum has over-swung, and it becomes impossible to right it.

"Facts," I exclaimed irritably; "twaddle, bosh! Your wife's money may be settled absolutely on herself, but I doubt if, in a case like this, she is even legally right. I, at least, shall have no hesitation in stating the case, as I know it—I, who heard her give the promise that——"

I was stopped in my impetuous flow of words by his look of disapproval—his hopeless shake of the head.

"Dr. Meredith, you do not know me. Do you think I would stoop to defend myself at the expense of a woman? Do you think I would leave my wife to the mercy of the tongues of a lot of meddling people? No, the thing is done. One or other of us must bear the brunt of it; and do you think for one moment that I would expose my domestic affairs to the prying glances of——"

He was too weak yet to enter into any explanation, and I blamed myself for allowing him to do so, as his head dropped again upon his bosom. Poor fellow! He was not the first man who had been linked to a woman who could not understand him, and I now understood how even in his worst moments he had ever loved her, and how he had expected her affectionate sympathy still; and it had galled him beyond endurance to find that she could side with his enemies. It was useless to argue with him, or to tell him that the money would be paid for him by sympathising friends; he absolutely refused to take a farthing which should be so collected. His words rang like a knell in my ears when he told me that he was determined to give no explanation, even to the members of his committee, and that he was as obstinately set upon allowing no one to defend him. My duty, as his medical attendant, was not to cross him, or to say anything to increase the load of depression to which I knew he was continually liable. His determination to martyrise himself positively went to the length of his quarrelling with one of his admirers, who took up the cudgels for him, and of his smiling with a sort of sickly sense of amusement at the abusive squibs which began to be placarded on the walls against him. He was of course distrusted, and those who had been his warmest supporters were suddenly turned against him.

"I suppose it is too much to expect public men to tell the truth habitually," remarked one of these quondam friends, with unconscious disdain in his eyes.

Well, the result was what might have been expected. Fearing some mischief, I managed to reach the polling station at Blackquay just in time to see the door closed in the troubled faces of some of the more prominent Liberals. When the poll was handed in, Robert Hendon stood more than a hundred votes behind the somewhat decrepid Conservative candidate, and but a few days before there had been but little doubt of the younger man gaining the contest. The personal feeling against him had proved so strong, that some of the electors had abstained from voting, and in other cases indignation had outweighed party considerations.

There was some difficulty in getting Hendon home. He insisted on walking, though he was shambling and stumbling like an old man, and acknowledged to a sensation like darkness before his eyes and a buzzing in his ears. At one corner of the street he was beset by a mob of roughs, who bespattered him with mud, and, though he maintained that calmness of outward demeanour which is a man's best protection in all such cases, I knew that his bodily weakness was great. He had told me that he felt as if his limbs were failing him. And when he turned on one of his assailants, saying quietly, as he rubbed the mud from his person, "Don't swear, my friend—it is weak and foolish," I was sick with fear and apprehension, knowing how likely it was that he would fall and be trampled upon, and brought home with half his ribs broken.

"It is a great pity that you made up your mind to walk," I said, as something whizzed past us, falling with a heavy thud on the ground.

"The only pity is that *you* were so obstinate as to accompany me," he answered, as he parted with me—going home for the last time to meet his wife.

It was an awful crisis, but Robert Hendon was somewhat of a fatalist, and he had braced himself to meet it. Margaret's want of sympathy with any of his schemes, her increasing discontent, her unqualified opinion of the superiority of her own judgment, must have resulted after a time in a separation between them. Her late line of action had only hastened the catastrophe. That the gloveless muscular hands which Robert had been so ready to help had been raised against him seemed only to prove to her that her reasoning had been right.

"It is your own fault if you are unpopular. You brought it

on yourself. I warned you against it," she declared, pale yet self-assured.

"Ah," he answered, with a laugh which was not good to hear, "the grand secret, if not of pleasing all, yet of displeasing none in this world, is, as Blake says, 'Court mediocrity, avoid originality, sacrifice to fashion, and go to hell,'—this was the programme you had planned for me."

She did not know how his heart was bleeding, but it seemed to her that he was profane. And the sneer which was so often to be detected in her voice was in it still as she answered:

"We need not expatiate on it. I acted as was necessary, and there's an end of it."

"I know you have never really loved me. Do not let us dissemble or conceal anything from each other. We have had enough of that. The position of a husband and wife who are not able to look boldly into each other's eyes, and hold out their hands freely to each other, is intolerable. I can bear it no longer. We must part company. Go your way and I will go mine. I have kept up appearances for you before the world, knowing how much you cared for those appearances. There is no need for any one to inquire into the true state of things." There was a little break in his voice as he continued, "We have tried to live together and failed—that is all—it is well we have found out our mistake before things became worse. But I agree with you that to talk about it is only to waste time."

If she was surprised she did not say so. It is probable that she knew as well as I did that nothing but an apology on her part could ever bring them together again. The man's affection was still stronger than his resentment, but when he asked her to reflect and hinted at the possibility of his forgiveness, she answered:

"I have reflected enough. I did my duty. Forgive! I don't want to be forgiven. You were obstinate, unyielding. You drove me to what I did."

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## IV.

THE whole thing was managed so quietly, with so little appearance of passionate anger, that when Mrs. Hendon had by her own wish left the neighbourhood of Halstead, taking her little girl with her (it was characteristic of Robert that though he had considered from the first it was necessary for one blow to involve the other, he never dreamed of asking his wife to

give up the child), it was scarcely possible to realise that any fracas had taken place.

It was only I who guessed how serious the consequences would be to Hendon's health, and I could only guess, for he did not send for me. He literally locked himself up as if in a prison, away from his fellow-men. To be exposed to hatred and contempt was one of the most trying ordeals to a man of his sensitive nature. He might have borne this trial in patience had he not been deprived at the same time of his domestic happiness. But his was, as I said before, an affectionate nature. The whole world had been associated for him with the thought of his wife and child. Success in life had no longer any attraction for him—there was nothing left to work for. It was from his servants I heard that their master never now opened a book, and complained that his brain was full of confusion and strange noises. He spent his days in wandering helplessly about his garden, looking at the flowers which he no longer cared to cultivate, or muttering to himself as he gazed at the stars at night.

Once I tried to intrude on him, but he would not let me speak to him on the subject of his health. It was evening, and he began to speculate about the heavenly bodies, declaring that they exercised some influence over human lives—that there was something weird about their ghastly majesty, and something intolerable to him in the thought that dying and extinct worlds were revolving round each other in their dance of death.

I tried to draw the conversation to his own affairs, and found to my astonishment that he had begun to look upon himself as a criminal, and that his self-respect and his previous confidence in his own good intentions had received, as it were, a mental shake. He was like a man bewildered, thinking, with a sort of wondering pain, of the time when he had been approved by his fellows, with his judgment valued and his talents highly appraised. He told me that he saw himself now in a stronger light. He did not revert to his wife any more than to remark that they had not understood the alphabet of each other's language, and that he had been perverse and headstrong, infatuated in his past life. She had died to him, and it was better; he had not the faculty of making any human creature happy.

"No, doctor, it is of no use," he said, putting his hand to his head. "I have lost my footing. There is darkness before my eyes, the world seems to be reeling away from me, and to come and disturb me can do no possible good." And then he muttered something about women who ought theoretically to

be all brightness and poetry, and added that it was "tantalising," looking at me as if for explanation in a way which made my heart positively ache.

I am afraid I went away in a most unchristian state of mind; on the one hand inveighing against the woman who had brought him to this pass, and on the other feeling sure that he was having recourse to those miserable drugs which were killing him by inches. I did not see what good I could do in either case. The mysterious tie of sympathy, and the difficulty of repugnant tastes between two people who had to live together, had always been a moral problem inexplicable to me. I could only dismiss it from my mind by wondering, like Charles Lamb, why people should be "born and constellated so opposite to each other in individual nature," and deploring the misfortune which had united such people for a time. And as to the poor, deserted fellow, though I knew that narcotics were poison to him, still England was a free country, and if he did not choose to consult me, I had no right to interfere with him. No doubt his mental sufferings were relieved for a time by the very drugs which afterwards took a ghastly revenge upon him.

No one saw or heard anything of him for some time after this. He lived a sort of dual existence, at one time in a state of hopeless despondency and pitiable prostration, and at another with the past restored to him, with merciful obliviousness of the future which was not to be. The dead seemed to be resuscitated. He was again a buoyant child with joyous schemes for the future, talking over them with a sympathetic mother, or a successful student at the University with his new ambitions half realised. Then again he would see himself leading a happy bride to the altar, or holding his little girl on his knee and pressing her baby lips to his mouth. He looked forward to an old age which should be gladdened by winsomeness and tenderness, and in the visions—which were stimulating as wine to him—he already knew himself famous. Men read his books and quoted his sayings; they gathered round his fireside and listened with deference to his talk. At such times the success of his schemes in improving the condition of the working people would gladden him as if it were a reality. Then came the horrible waking up, the dissolving of the spell, and the appalling conviction that he was yielding to a miserable habit which was weaving its meshes about him. The sudden recollection of his loneliness and failure, his great hopes cruelly blasted, and his childless widowerhood was more than he could endure. The only hope seemed to be to fly back to the fallacious

semblance, at the risk of the remorse which was beginning to add to his other agonies.

In the brief flashes of returning sense, he would remember with shame that he could not continue to yield in such excess to a despicable vice without exposing himself to his servants. He had been good to them, and they were attached to him. One old woman especially refused to hear any ill of him, and clung to him with a sort of canine fidelity which could not be shaken. The poor old soul came to me at last literally trembling and telling me through her tears :

"He do settle hisself to sleep most times in the day—sometimes o' the hearthrug where the coal is ready to fall on 'im ; sometimes in a sort o' thing that the sailors has to sleep in—slung up in the drawing-room. And then he ses he can dhrame bad or good, just as he pleases ; all the time he do talk about dhrames just like the poor critter in the children's hymn, only that he don't care nothin' about the eatin'."

"And so he thinks he can help to force his own dreams ?" I said reflectively, half to myself.

"Well, one day, sir, his 'ead was that 'ot that I persuaded him to ha' a poultice, and sure I makes it as nice as possible, and when he wakes up, 'Cook,' ses he, 'I dreamt all night as I was a-being scalped by a lot o' roaring Injuns ; that was all along o' yer poultice.' And then he sends out Tummas, who comes home ready to split his sides wi' laughin', to buy 'im one o' those windin' up boxes as plays tunes all the time, and sets it in 'is bedroom, all on account o' they dhrames. And then, ses he, when I let the poker drop t'other night, 'Cook,' says he, as serious as could be, 'Cook, d'ye think as Joseph could iver ha' dreamt his dhrames if folks had let fire-irons tumble down in his room ?'"

I dismissed the woman, hoping something from her story. If this mental volition still existed, and he fancied he could use it to force his dreams, I began to hope I might utilise it for something else.

"You are killing yourself by inches," I said, speaking as sternly as I could.

Even then the sense of humour had not quite left him. He did not deny the accusation, but said, as he tried to meet me as if nothing had happened :

"Well, doctor, do you seriously think that would not be the kindest thing I could do for myself? Would you deprive me of my opium, my haschich, for such a small thing as *that?*" And then he added, speaking passionately, "I am not the only poor

wretch who, in disgust at individual existence, is attracted by the abyss of the Infinite."

"Wicked bosh!" I continued, the more sternly, inasmuch as I saw that he could not keep his hand from trembling, and that he was speaking in deadly earnest. "Robert Hendon, if you will not call upon God to help you, at least you can make an effort to help yourself."

"You need not think of me as a regular heathen," he answered, looking at me a little strangely. "Job called upon God, and yet he wondered as much as I do why he was not killed and done with, as a new-born infant, and I must confess it often puzzles me why I, too, was not put out of existence by some of those merciful vicissitudes of climate, disease, or accident which exterminate so many. I have been thinking a good deal about it, and I have come to the conclusion that if Job had lived in the present day people would have called him mad."

"Well, as to Job, things were only bad with him for a time," I said, keeping my presence of mind, and fighting off a creepy sensation which was beginning to come over me. "He lived to see, as I hope you will, that he had no right to judge the design of his Maker when he saw but little of it. We must wait for the completion of this life before we judge."

He moved his chair a little nearer to mine, and looked at me again with the indefinable expression which had alarmed me, as he asked, lowering his voice:

"What would you say if I were to tell you that I have once or twice been tempted, as if by an actual devil, to take an overdose of that stuff, and cumber the world no more?"

"Say!—why, that when we think the devil is dead, having heaped a lot of ashes on his grave—and you, I think, have been one who denied his personal existence—that is just the time when he takes a fresh lease of life. I can quite believe you. You shut yourself up, and when folks are in solitude the devil is most pugnacious and insistent."

"And you are not frightened of me?" he asked again, with a break in his voice. "Not when I tell you that I am mad—that my brain is full of confusion and strange noises, and that my only hope seems to be to dream, for when I am awake it is almost impossible to distinguish the imaginary from the real."

"All the more reason," I answered, retaining my presence of mind, "that you should make a desperate effort to clear the fog from your brain. Suicide is a disease. You are bringing that disease on yourself. A man who desires death has already begun to die. A healthy body craves physical life as the healthy

soul craves life everlasting. If you throw away both, it will be your own fault, for you are deliberately breaking and weakening the springs of action."

He sat in an attitude of hopeless dejection, but I saw he listened to my words, and I continued indignantly:

"Mad! Do you know that, if I may talk to you in unprofessional language, I should say that the distinction between sanity and insanity is so slight that we can any of us make ourselves mad if we choose to do so? Afraid of you?" I repeated, with scorn. "Let me tell you I was not even afraid when a fellow much more powerful than you are came to me alone, and told me that he had to contend with sudden murderous impulses. That man was a thousand times worse than you are, but I was not afraid of him, or his nervous complaints, simply because he had the power of *will*. A man is very rarely mad who has consciousness that his mental faculties are becoming disabled, and is able to talk about it. But *you*—I have no pity for you. You are destroying the very faculty which distinguishes you from the brute creation; you are killing your will by inches. Man," I said, facing round on him, "I have no wish to intrude on those secrets which are reserved for the Searcher of hearts. But I know how you have been struggling, wandering in a perplexed maze, and how baffled tenderness often results in the bitterest scepticism. I know all this, but it is no excuse for the habit you are indulging in. Rouse yourself while there is time. Leave this place where you feel as if you cannot face your fellows, and where civility given against the grain may seem to you to take the form of slights. Above all, leave this house which reminds you of the past. Exert yourself. You have talents—they ought to be used for the benefit of others, even though the glamour may have vanished out of your own life. And above all throw away this poison once and for ever. It has degraded you and shamed you."

I suited the action to the words, as I seized the phial containing the dark fluid which was constantly by his side and shivered it into pieces on the fender. He did not attempt to hinder me, but sat cowering and shaking with nervous agitation, as I added:

"Months ago I should have said you were too generous a man to abuse a merciful gift for dulling the physical agonies of suffering humanity into an agent of destruction for yourself mentally, morally, and spiritually, as well as bodily. Live or die! It is your own affair."

Poor fellow! Though I had wound myself up into a state of passionate denunciation, my heart ached for him as I spoke.

But I knew that it was a supreme crisis, and no half-measures would do. Before I left him that day, I obtained a promise from him to abstain from indulging in the delicious dreams with which that potent drug had lulled his hours of anguish. And it seemed as if I were cruel, for I persuaded him to renounce the alcohol as well. I think he scarcely knew what he was doing when I further induced him to cross the water and take the night train to Switzerland. I trusted much to the pure air of the Engadine, and fortunately for my plan I had a kind and trusted friend, himself a scholar of refined tastes, who had sought the air of the mountain heights for an affection of the lungs some years before. To him I found it necessary to tell the story of Hendon's sorrow and his subsequent excesses. And fortunately for us all that inexplicable quality—sympathy—proved to be so strong between these two men, both of delicate organisation and both with nervous systems abnormally developed, that the influence of the one over the other could be freely and successfully used. It was comforting to me to hear that Robert Hendon responded so gratefully to the tenderness and respect with which he was treated that after a time he seemed to forget much of his past suffering and was even able to resume his scientific investigations. And then, as time passed, I could have had no greater proof that the mental balance was thoroughly restored than the appearance of some choice *brochures*, or thoughtful pamphlets generally on some social subject which was stirring public opinion, and always anonymous, but which bore the unmistakable stamp of Robert Hendon's genius. These were, perhaps, all the better from the fact that his was now a sequestered and intense experience, with plenty of time for reflection and little for volcanic sentiment. A sequestered experience, but no longer a solitary one; for as I had discerned from the commencement of our acquaintance, Robert Hendon's was not a nature in which mental pleasure could ever take the place of feeling; yet friendship could to some extent substitute love.

"He is constantly with me," his new friend wrote, "and yet I am no longer afraid for him to be alone. The rushing streams, the eternal snows, the mists and torrents, and even the little wild-flowers—the gentian and the *alpen rose*—seem to soothe and comfort him. Love of beauty is still a master instinct with him, but it is the beauty of this ever-changing nature. Only in one respect does he retain a relic of his former ailment. He shuns the society of women. It is useless to argue with him about this terror of them. To talk about it is to recall that past which of all things it is desirable that he should forget.

He has helped to build a châlet for himself, and carved the Lutheran motto with his own hands. He is perfectly happy, though it is a happiness which people with vacant minds would find it difficult to comprehend."

Soon after this I had an unexpected visitor. It was on one of those evenings of which at Halstead we have only two or three in the year, when the sun had been sinking in great flame-coloured sheets of cloud, and when the gorgeous brilliance of the peaks and chasms of the cliffs had faded into an intense sapphirine blue-black, a tint which spread itself by degrees over the illimitable Atlantic. My eyes were somewhat dazzled with looking at the brilliancy, so that I did not at first recognise my visitor, who was clad in deep crape garments. She threw up her veil with a gesture which was familiar to me, and then I saw she was Robert Hendon's wife. She came to tell me that she had lost her child. The little one had never been very strong, and she had seemed to pine when she missed the air of Halstead.

"I am quite alone," Margaret said, and I saw that she was no longer on such good terms with herself as she had been wont to be.

It was no business of mine. I had learnt to keep silent as well as to speak at certain times. And what could I have told the lady but that I thought she had brought some of her troubles on herself?

I saw that she discerned my thoughts, and yet that she hoped, through intervention of some kind, to patch up a reconciliation which might only have ended in intensified bitterness on both sides. "The pity of it," I thought, as I stood looking at her pale face and remembering that she had cast away such a great love as Robert Hendon's, and that, though he was now disabused of his love, nothing would induce him to speak lightly of her. He shrank, as Henry Newcombe had written, from all other women—a fact which made me regret the less that Heaven—perhaps in mercy—had deferred to the other life the question, which might have become a difficult one, of inducing him to be simple and natural in the company of his grown-up child. That no such revival of a sentiment which had been extinguished could ever be artificially induced between himself and his wife, I was perfectly sure.

And when she began to speak of her "forgiveness," not noticing my hurried answer that "there was nothing to forgive," adding that, if necessary, she would even "expatriate herself," I found it difficult to explain to her that I utterly declined to act as an intermediary.

Somehow that childish myth—some people pretend those myths have meanings—about Humpty Dumpty and his fall, and how "all the king's horses and all the king's men" could not put Humpty Dumpty together again, kept jogging on in my memory. I was sorry for the woman. Her character was always powerful, and, without her impressive expression of face, I could guess the terrible struggle which she must have had to conquer her own pride, before she could make up her mind to ask me to mediate. And yet I knew it was useless. *Hin*, as the German poet says, *ist Hin*, "gone is gone." No after-advances of hers could serve to piece together Robert Hendon's broken heart.

I put my hand gently on hers. And yet I said firmly:

"My dear madam, I am under a solemn promise not to betray the secret of his retirement. And, even if I could do so, I should have to advise you most strongly *not* to go to him."

She went her way, and I saw her no more.

# NANCY LANGRIDGE'S SECRET

## I.

IT was not often that I received a summons to London. But when, after the usual initiatory struggle, my footing had become sufficiently firm in provincial practice for my name to be familiar to my professional brethren in what Miss Delmott was accustomed to call the "great Babylon," it occasionally happened that some case which required skilful watching was confided to my care. Such a case had been that of Basil Langridge, Royal Academician, a man whose genius had long ago received public recognition, but who for some time past had disappointed the leading Art critic of England by the perversity with which, in spite of his rapid production, he refrained from executing masterpieces which were to enrol him in the ranks of those immortals destined to transmit their names to posterity. Basil Langridge was popular, and, as the Art critic had said, too popular for that immortality which his works should have achieved. His pictures at the Academy were always surrounded by a crowd of connoisseurs, purchasers, and, alas, the utterly uncultivated. They could never be called commonplace, but they were sometimes rough, and occasionally even careless, in technical finish.

The artist had made large profits. When he first came to stay at Halstead-by-Sea, and I was called to attend him for some trifling attack of rheumatism, he had brought with him from town a large number of retainers. His wife was a handsome woman, whose toilettes were the talk of the neighbourhood. His beautiful children were expensively dressed. The county people invited them, and drove long distances to call upon them

Basil Langridge's visit to Halstead was considered to be an event, especially when it became known that he was painting a picture of Halstead beach, which was to be exhibited the following year at the Academy. I remember little Miss Elsey's chirps of satisfaction, and her anxiety as to whether Mr. Langridge would put in the bathing-machines, and how we laughed when she told us that a friend had solemnly assured her "a man of genius could never be expected to condescend to such vulgar detail as bathing-machines."

Years had elapsed since this picture had figured before the eyes of the London world. Some of us had been obliged discontentedly to admit that it was about as much like Halstead beach as any other picturesque seascape with the usual rocks and seagulls, and the usual long, curling waves breaking with scattered foam on sand which skirted the shingle. I must confess I had almost forgotten the existence of Mr. Langridge, when I received a letter from my friend Dr. Thornley, of Harley Street, which interested me as an account of any out-of-the-common case must interest a medical man who cares for his work. If I were to give the details of that letter, you would scarcely understand them. It told me that Langridge had for some time been suffering from symptoms of distress in the eyesight, accompanied by sore lids, bloodshot corneæ, and other signs of irritative or inflammatory disturbance; that in the beginning of the ailment Dr. Thornley had been inclined to attribute the headache and giddiness that accompanied the indistinctness of vision simply to the affection of the eye; that, in consequence, he had sent him to a celebrated oculist, who had prescribed spectacles to diminish the convergence of the muscles, according to a method approved in Germany. But these spectacles, like all other remedies, had failed. And, as Langridge had unfortunately lived up to his income, it was understood that his failure of sight—so essential to his means of livelihood—had already been accompanied by the heaviest money losses.

Knowing as I did how these affections of the eyes are often dependent on those of the brain and the arteries, I was not surprised that my London friend recommended change of scene, and thought that a sojourn of some duration at an inexpensive place like Halstead might prove recuperative in more ways than one. The air of Halstead, as my correspondent reminded me, had always suited his patient so well that it was not impossible he might decide on parting with his expensive house in a well-known locality near London, and taking up his abode in the country for good. I was not sure that I thought this a wise

recommendation. We had not then reverted to the manners of the ancient Egyptians, who had doctors for each disease, and that disease only, and I considered that a man who was well trained in his profession ought to be able to deal with such a case, just as a sound ophthalmic surgeon ought to have a good deal of all-round information.

But I doubted if Halstead would be sufficiently lively. The mere recommendation of "change of scene" might not be enough for Langridge. He probably needed a mental restorative, and it was a pity to be obliged to consider economy. Utility at Halstead was put before artistic culture.

The letter, however, ended by requesting me to come up to town at once, not only to give my opinion on the mysterious malady, but because Langridge, whose nervous system had received a serious shock, and who could scarcely realise the nature of his affliction, asked for me somewhat impatiently and was desirous to make his new arrangements.

I cannot say that I was pleased when I received this letter. My one longing was to get the tiresome visit over. For it was in a cold and foggy November, and the years were beginning to tell on me. I reserved to myself the Englishman's privilege of grumbling at being dragged in this way to London, when, as an old man, I had enough to do in alleviating the aches and pains of my fellow-creatures at Halstead.

I knew that Langridge had been a widower now for several years, but I could not help recalling moody memories of the airs and graces which he and his wife used to give themselves about a decade before when they visited us. All the same, my impulse was to obey the summons quickly, so as to get the consultation over, and return to my regular work. I set out, in spite of the cold, at an early hour in the morning, and reached Paddington Station about three in the afternoon, where I jumped into a hansom and began rattling over the stones to reach the "palatial mansion," as I suppose the house-agents would have called it, which the R.A. had built for himself at Clapham.

The fates were in league against my temper that day. For first of all I had to take the part of a poor aggrieved old fellow who had been travelling near me in a third-class carriage, and who, as he staggered out of the station, was roughly accused of being drunk and incapable, merely because he was shaky on his legs, and somewhat benumbed with cold. Then, when I told the cabby to make speed, we nearly drove over a child. I grunted to myself that the dwellers in London were exposed to so many dangers, seen and unseen, that every child was in danger of being killed in street accidents, and every grown-up

man or woman might be garotted or taken into custody by the police for obscure causes best known to the constabulary intellect.

I blessed my stars that I was at Halstead, and declared I would not live in an atmosphere which was befogged amid grimy habitations and ear-piercing noises even if I were to be as rich as the greatest swells in the profession. I had almost persuaded myself that in London practice there must be a dash and a hurry, an excessive haste and consequent want of time for thought, a fatal facility which was to be deplored in doctoring as much as in other pursuits. But I took a less jaundiced view of things as soon as we left behind us the high-shouldered and unsightly houses which in some of the narrower streets had seemed to block out too much of the sky.

"You are a cantankerous old fool," I said to myself, "to be so ready to accuse others of a mere striving after pecuniary success which is sure to be blighting. Take care you never scamp your *own* work. And you know perfectly well it is nonsense to say that smoke has much to do with fogs. Smoke may be a nuisance, but the two things are distinct. It is bad enough for the public to jump to the conclusion that, because there are fogs in London, smoke is the pernicious factor in the case. You know very well that is only an hypothesis."

At any rate, we were getting out of the smoke-cloud. Clapham Common may not be very beautiful now, but it had its attractions some little while ago. My ears were no longer bothered by that murmur of distant sound, like bees swarming in a lime-tree, from which the Londoner at best cannot hope to escape. I had reached my destination rather earlier than I had expected, and was somewhat overwhelmed with the magnificence of the artist's house.

The house was intended to be built far away from the fog centres, and it was a revelation of the dainty tastes of the owner, like some of those exquisite habitations of shell which marine animals are said to construct for themselves by being fastidious about environment.

Basil Langridge's dainty selection of the fittest resulted in all sorts of luxuries—amongst others, in a glass conservatory filled with hothouse flowers, and an entrance-hall light enough for one to see the decorated panels, though it was nearly four o'clock, and had been dark at noon in town. I saw at once that the best apartments faced the light and warmth of the southern sky. And there was a stir of life which surprised me; people coming and going up and down the decorated staircase, and carriages waiting at the classic porch of the entrance-hall.

I had always known that poverty—which is the almost necessary accompaniment of artistic life in its caterpillar or grub stage before it bursts into the butterfly—could not long have hampered Langridge. But I realised for the first time the full import of the accusation which I had heard made more than once—that this man had painted for money, and that his wife and children had been noted for their expensive tastes. Mrs. Langridge, I remembered, had not been content with being the mistress of the studio, the friend of writers who had distinguished themselves, of cultivated musicians, and other celebrated people. Her main rôle in life had been that of a fashionable leader, liking to be talked about and admired.

"And this sort of humbug goes on still," I said to myself, no longer wondering that Basil Langridge would be unable to save anything from the wreck of his fortunes, and wondering vaguely if all his daughters had inherited their mother's love of display.

It was evident that I had not been expected quite so soon. The servant, who showed me to a private room, explained that his master's pictures were "on view" before being sent to one of the Winter Exhibitions. The room to which I was shown was, as I afterwards discovered, the least beautiful in this wonderful mansion—that is, it was less of a museum for rare objects, expensive as well as unique, than the drawing-room or the studio—but it was still tasteful and home-like. I could see at a glance that it had wooden panelling, carved oak furniture, and a sort of sixteenth-century window, which Langridge had transported like many other curious things, and which was remarkable for its latticed glass. Close to the glass window stood a girl, somewhat strangely dressed, arranging chrysanthemums of varying shades in vases which for elegant shape might have been dug out of the ruins of Pompeii. Till this moment it had been difficult to realise the lapse of time, but it suddenly flashed upon me that this uncommon-looking young woman must be one of the children, almost babies, whom I had seen years before at Halstead. Remembering also that Langridge had had a fad for naming his daughters by Chaucerian names, as he constantly chose his themes for his pictures from the Canterbury Tales, I said, with a smile:

"I suppose I have the pleasure of addressing Miss Blanche Langridge?"

"No, I am plain Nancy. You would not remember me, Dr. Meredith. I was the baby in arms. My sisters are Griselda and Dorigen."

"I was thinking of the Duchesse Blanche," I answered, still with a recollection of her father's sentimentality.

"More than one person has made that mistake," she replied, quite gravely.

Then perhaps, I thought to myself, more than one person had told her that hers was exactly the cast of countenance described by Chaucer in his "Duchesse Blanche." "Debbonnaire, good, gladde and sadde," the combination which one so rarely sees of earnestness and playfulness, and that, oddly enough, the likeness was continued even in the hair, which was neither red, nor yellow, nor brown. "Methought most liké gold it was." I had read my Chaucer as well as my Shakespeare, and I felt that, if my friend had wished to make a hit, he ought to have called this girl Blanche instead of Nancy.

I wondered if she was "stedfaste," like her namesake, being careful to make no further allusion to her personal appearance. To test her, I began grumbling at my wretched drive through London. I repeated that I would not live in London if I were paid for it; and then I added:

"As to men who have distinguished themselves, they are better out of the racket. They must be either jostled by other people trying to get into their berths, or worried by being lionised, and having incense burnt before them. And after you have caught your lion, and put your hand on his mane, and fed him with unwholesome rubbish, it is just as likely the public will turn round on him, and jeer and laugh at him," I continued.

I was making talk just to save time, and to prevent the girl from feeling awkward while I was kept waiting. I had no idea that she would so quickly catch at my meaning, and answer it with tears in her eyes.

"Ah, Dr. Meredith, then you *know!* It will kill him if we let him go on like this, and if he finds out how they are talking."

"Know what?" I asked, in some consternation, feeling that my words had overshot the mark, and that I had somehow said more than I had intended.

"Why, that even to-day there is a private view of his paintings before he sends them to one of the Winter Exhibitions, and that we cannot tell him—he does not believe—that people are laughing at him. They cannot refuse to exhibit the paintings, you know, on account of his high standing. But there are the critics. Cannot we prevent him from exposing himself to them?"

I was silent. I could not repeat the epigram which Disraeli afterwards made famous, and tell her the "critics were the men who had failed," and that the right way was to snap one's

fingers at them. For, as Thornley had written to me, there was a sort of obstinacy about the man who had prided himself on the power of not only producing clever pictures, but learned and scientific pictures, if he chose to take the pains. It was too true that already Langridge was being laughed at; true also that he was ceasing to make money by his paintings, and that his self-sufficiency was so great he would refuse to take a hint. He had been successful for so long that he now attributed it to jealousy when other men no longer admired his productions. The grapes had been plucked so easily that, now they had become sour, he chose, unfortunately, to adopt a lofty and temporising tone about them. Any answer which I might have made was rendered unnecessary by the appearance of the patient.

Basil Langridge had always been picturesque, and even now, though his health was shattered and his eyes dimmed, he had still the nobility of face which compensated for defective stature. The forehead was still remarkable for fine and expressive modelling, but there was an assumption of youthfulness which seemed to be studied.

"Oh, at a distance his age decreases at the rate of a year for every foot," some wag was said to have observed who made merry at his expense, and it was certainly true that Langridge looked older when he came near and when one had time to notice that the face was intersected with a network of fine lines. We medical men are so accustomed to watching a patient's face as an index of disease that we get insensibly into the habit of taking the man for what his face, and not his words, proclaim him. Professionally speaking, the assumption of youthfulness was nothing to me. Time had written its indelible handwriting on Basil Langridge's features; his history and his motives were reproduced in his expression, and I could read the weariness in the expression. It was an open secret known to half artistic London that though Langridge's life had been comparatively free from those sort of tragic difficulties which attend the fluctuations of the money market, yet his wife and children had cared more for creating a reputation in the world than that success in his career which should have been nearest to their hearts.

"Well, doctor," he said, in a tone which betrayed the concealment of some emotion he was attempting to hide, "you take me at a disadvantage. I remember how you used to tell me that too much exertion was a waste of tissue, and one must be careful of tissue when one gets past forty."

If he had said past fifty or close upon sixty, it would have

been nearer the truth, but these pleasant little fictions were a part of his stock-in-trade. I remembered how he told me once that he treated the world like a painted woman. It would be his part never to rub the rouge off her, and then he would not learn to detest the harlot. Perhaps he remembered the old cynical talk also, for he said, with a laugh :

"Ah, you see, I am finding out, as you said, that life is not all effervescing champagne ; I dare say Thornley has told you that Fortune has turned her wheel. The present state of the family exchequer will soon be a secret from no one, but meanwhile I don't mean to tell my secrets to the town-crier. Yes, I dare say a compromise can be effected. Thornley talks of a sojourn at Halstead ; that will strengthen my eyes. Oh ! you must not take my little troubles too much to heart. If there were more people like you, the world could not go on. I have had my good things, and my children have reaped the benefit of them. You have heard of the double marriage. No?" he said, rubbing his hands. "Thornley has not told you ? I have done my best for my children, whatever betides. A poet, an artist, who does not marry and have children has never seen the beautiful, tender world, as the Germans would say. Have you seen my last pictures ?"

He had never been shy in speaking about his pictures. The artistic temperament is quicker and easier, more ready to discuss its successes and failures than the literary one. I seized the opportunity which he was so ready to offer me, and one glance at the pictures, and at the faces of the visitors who were looking at them, told me a good deal. Thinking over the case on my journey from Halstead, I had had a sort of presentiment which was now firmly justified. Basil Langridge's infirmity was not weakness of sight only, but a species of colour-blindness supervening on a state of debility and excitability of the nervo-muscular apparatus.

Many persons, as it is well known, are born colour-blind. In others the colour perception requires to be trained like the rest of the faculties, and a tendency to colour-blindness may sometimes be averted by a careful system of sense-culture, training the eyes in seeing, as we do the ears in hearing. But I have sometimes thought that a power of seeing colours differently—some more strongly and others modified—may have something to do with the great success of certain artists. Just as a certain amount of near-sightedness—bringing the objects of a landscape into a sort of judicious "keeping," and modifying distances by delicate haze—may have much to do with the successes of others. I had myself a theory that education in

the science of colours should be a part of the curriculum of every artist. But Basil Langridge's sense of colour *had* been wonderfully acute. It was now altogether vitiated. His disconnected conversation pointed to the same cause as that by which the colour perception had become disturbed. To avoid technical detail, it would be sufficient to say that the disease was one which had a nervous origin.

The difficulty was how to soothe him, and keep him from rattling on in his disconnected talk, till my consultation with Dr. Thornley, which was to take place after dinner. My powers of *finesse* were always small, and I reproached myself for a tell-tale face when I was roused by the melodious clang of the gong, and joined the family at the dinner-table, dazzling with Oriental china and old Venetian glass. The two brides-elect with Chaucerian names, and nothing of the Chaucerian meekness and gentleness about them, monopolised much of the talk, whilst Nancy sat quiet, sharing, as I could see, in my own doleful anticipations. There were no silences, no pauses, no restful breathing-spaces, such as I had expected. At any other time it would have been amusing to notice how Griselda and Dorigen gave the lie to their names, and were as far from being content to be complementary creatures or satellites of genius as their mother had been before them. Had they any idea of the crash which was impending, any pity for their father, whose character had never been braced to meet indignity or humiliation?

My questions seemed to be superfluous as I listened to their chatter. They paid little attention to me, and evidently looked upon me as the doctor who might help to bring to light some skeleton at the feast. Langridge himself talked rapidly, as if he too were anxious to keep unpleasant thoughts at arm's length. I could not help feeling like an intruder who might possibly be disliked, because—body and mind being so closely connected with each other—it would be my duty to lift the veil and discern the characters of my fellow-mortals. Was it my fault if it was sometimes a part of my duty to get an insight into the causes which affected the condition of the organism? That the glib talk had something in it which was disquieting, I felt sure. I looked unconsciously at the sweet seriousness of the younger sister's face, and fell into a reverie, till my host suddenly observed that my plate was empty, and plied me with Lafitte too dainty for my taste.

When we were once more alone, his over-wrought humour failed, and an expression of irritable gloom settled on his face. Still he tried to keep up the banter.

"Sir Joshua," he said, "held the married artist to be a

ruined man, and so did Carnioli. 'Un artiste marié c'est un artiste fini,'—don't you remember his words, doctor? I have enjoyed life, taking it all-in-all more than other people; but now comes the deluge," and he shrugged his shoulders disdainfully.

"Sir Joshua was an old bachelor," I answered evasively.

"The worst evil of modern poverty is its vulgar surroundings, its ugliness, its narrowness—to me insupportable," he was continuing, with a volubility which was fortunately checked by Dr. Thornley's arrival.

I need not say it was a relief to me to be able to proceed to business. Yet the hour and a half had not been wasted during which I had drawn my deductions. Sensitive as the artist was, I had decided that he must be stopped from exhibiting pictures which would only expose him to ridicule. The colour-blindness might disappear when the general health was relieved, and when the brain, which had spent itself not only in the search for beauty, but in that search as a means to the end of lavish expenditure, must rest from its exhaustion.

It was necessary before my departure to break the news to his daughters. With this intention, I entered one of the drawing-rooms, which were divided from each other by a portière of tapestry. There were voices in the adjacent room, and as I prepared to advance into it, thinking that I must have been heard to enter and close the door, I was arrested by words which I felt were not meant for my ears.

"Grisel," said Nancy's voice, in a tone of liveliest disapproval, "how can you propose such a thing to me?"

"What?" was the laughing rejoinder. "I thought from what you said about papa that you had quite a commercial spirit? It is not I who said you were mercenary. But you would have a house of your own, recollect, and plenty to keep the pater, when you pretend to care so much about him."

"It is dreadful indeed!" said the other indignant voice, "dreadful to be made to think of marriage as a sort of necessity."

"You put it in the coarsest way," was the instant retort, "You know that when we are married *we* can do nothing to help him. And you, who have always pretended to be such a saint, I should have thought you would do *anything* to mitigate such cruel suffering as he will feel. Now, if *I* had the opportunity——"

I did not wait to hear Griselda glibly assert her filial piety. To hesitate would only be to make my position worse. So I advanced boldly between the curtains, at the risk of any surprise I might cause by my intrusion. I was prepared simply to

confess the circumstances, but the girls were apparently so absorbed in their conversation that they scarcely noticed my entrance. Nancy was sitting in front of the fire, and did not turn her head to look at me. Bright spots of colour burnt on either cheek. She was meditating on some problem which the burning coals might help her to solve. The unpleasant discovery that she would have to work out the problem for herself, and that all the explorers who had gone before her could not help her to solve this difficult question in the battle of her own life, would only be enhanced by what I had to tell her.

I advanced, stood near her, trying to get her to listen to me, and taking little notice of the elder sister, whose attitude seemed to be one of antagonism.

"You must not let your father exhibit those pictures," I said. "At all costs you must prevent him. And you must get him to wind up his affairs, and come away as quickly as possible."

"Is that *all?*" she asked, with a gasp as if she had been waiting for a sword to descend on her head. "Is his condition hopeless?"

Glancing hastily at her elder sister, she waited for my answer. There was a pause of expectation, during which I heard her laboured breath.

"Not hopeless by any means; the cure depends upon his general health. But he will need care. He has been used to luxury. And worst of all—unless we can humour him"—and I waited, blurting out the homely word "bamboozle" him—"he will not have the comfort of his work; it will be better for him to discontinue it."

"Oh, poor father!" she said, in a subtle tone of tenderness, like that of a stock-dove cooing to its young, so curiously were the domestic relations between these two inverted. "Poor father—you do not know—it would not be possible for him to live without his work."

Then, with a comprehensive glance which seemed to take in the walls, ornamented with little gems in the way of art, and the cabinets filled with Dresden and old Chelsea china, with a few specimens of Sèvres and Wedgwood, she continued:

"He knows already that he will have to part from all his pretty things—that is bad enough—to be ruined—sent into exile! But when he always thought he had something to teach his fellow-men—that he could see something in the very sunlight and the leaves on the trees which other people could not see, and that his mission was to make *them* see it—oh, it will be heartrending information!"

Then, with another of those sudden changes of mood which

seemed to be characteristic of her, she lifted her flushing face, and, especially addressing her sister, added :

"There is one thing—he will care less for the changes of fortune—the greater pain must deaden the lesser one ;" and appealing to me, "Dr. Meredith, would you not give it as your experience that, if a man is suffering from a wound of this kind, he will be invulnerable to pin-pricks, nettle-stings, and things of that sort?"

"Granted," I answered, doing everything I could to calm her. "But you must recollect that, in your father's case, the wound is not irrevocable. As soon as it is healed, he may recover his sensibility to minor ills."

"And, meanwhile," she said, with conviction, turning again to her sister, "it will not matter where he hides himself—the main thing will be to cure the disease."

I did not wait in London longer than for the night-mail, but I was not sorry when Langridge—who seemed to have taken a fancy to me—sent urgent messages for me to visit him once or twice more before he broke up his establishment at Clapham. A yearly recurring change of scene is not perhaps so necessary to men who live, as I did, amid healthy rural surroundings and in highly ozonised sea-air. But the nature of my occupation, which constantly taxed the nervous system, and was apt to become wearisome both physically and mentally, made me welcome the occasional relaxation of a visit to that beautiful house. On the second occasion I found Langridge surrounded by artist friends. I knew of no retreat where a man could more pleasantly spend time, with the delightful stimulant of genial talk and of lovely environment. I, who was apt to be drawn into a professional groove, began to appreciate the versatility of Basil Langridge's life, and I began to fear lest he should not be able to grapple with his new difficulties and the perplexities caused by his ailment in the duller atmosphere of Halstead.

We had, however, no choice, and we were bound to make the best of it. Impoverished as he was, and anxious to do the best for his children, his one object seemed to be to keep up appearances till the double wedding—the account of which I saw afterwards in the *Morning Post*—was over. The world is never wanting in kind hearts, and this occasion was no exception to the rule, judging from the number of the wedding gifts, and the important guests who were arriving to honour the ceremony with their presence. The reports which were being circulated as to Langridge's state of health had not as yet injured his popularity. The bridegrooms were neither of them wealthy men, and one of them had had stories told about him which were

not altogether to his credit. It was not my business to inquire into these stories, and I only judged from my patient's incoherent and somewhat rambling conversation that the sale of the house, its elaborate furniture, and the articles of virtu which had been amassed during so many years of his life, would be sufficient to cover the expenses of the wedding and all other outlying debts.

If the two elder girls seemed to be phlegmatic with regard to the sacrifice which their father was making for them, the younger appeared to be under the strain of some strong nervous excitement. If the others could chatter easily about their prospects in life, indifferent as to the "deluge" which was to come after them, Nancy was given to "flashes of silence." And if sometimes she would make an effort to shake herself, as it were, out of dreamland, she would relapse again into these fits of depression, and I was struck by the nervous way in which her fingers were often twisted in each other. Sometimes I had an idea that she felt it to be a sort of sacrilege to discuss domestic affairs before a comparative stranger like myself, and then again I could see that it would be an alleviation to whatever she was feeling if she could know that it was shared in some way by others who were with her. Less striking, though by no means less interesting than her sisters, who were well aware of the sensation they would be likely to create on their bridal day, and who were after all very little implicated in the fall of the House of Langridge, she was evidently little in sympathy with them.

But it was inevitable that she and I should be thrown a good deal together, for Nancy was playfully dubbed "the sick-nurse of the family," and if ever I had to discuss the symptoms of my patient, or make some alteration in his *régime*, I had neither hesitation nor embarrassment in applying to her.

I was somewhat surprised and startled when she said to me one day:

"Cannot you get my father to hasten his arrangements? Cannot you hurry him away as soon as the wedding is over?"

I tried a little badinage, one of her sisters being present, and made some foolish speech about brides being privileged people, and nobody having the heart to seem in a hurry when Cupid or Hymen were in the case.

She shrugged her shoulders a little disdainfully. Her shrug seemed to say:

"Then you are like everybody else. If people would only be a little more sensible, and not talk of marriage in that senseless way."

I smiled to myself, and should have liked to have told her that she was taking my foolish speeches too seriously. She was evidently a puzzle to her family, with her definite ways of expressing herself, her brave outlook into the future, her impulsive and outlandish expressions, which led her to be looked upon as if she were a sort of stray sheep ready to leap social fences.

It might have been a necessary consequence of my constant presence in the house that the sisters began by degrees to talk pretty freely in my presence.

More than once Nancy was rallied on her solemn way of taking things, whilst I guessed that the anxieties mostly pressed on her young shoulders.

Her colour deepened, and methought she protested a little too much when she said impetuously one day:

"Nothing of *that* sort is going to happen to me. Surely it is enough for me to take care of my father——"

Griselda looked up, and said, with a light laugh:

"Do you know, you foolish little woman, you will make people think something mysterious is the matter if you talk in such a desperately tragic way about nothing."

"Then you should not have alluded in a pointed way to me," said the younger girl, determined not to be rebuffed. But at the same time I saw the quick look of dismay rising like a red flag of distress on either cheek as an easy-going, worldly matron who was present remarked:

"*I* think it is a pity, but Nancy was always determined to be the old maid of the family. She has too many fads to be like other people."

"It is better to be an old maid," said the girl, with a meaning smile, "than to marry any one for whom one could not really *care*."

"My dear Nan!" exclaimed Dorigen remonstratingly. For though the elder sister had hitherto sat silent, outwardly as placid as usual, yet there was something in her tone by which she managed to make every one feel that there was something underbred in the conversation.

"My dear Dorigen!" echoed Nancy, "there is really nothing outrageous in what I said. Every one who thinks at all would agree with me that it would be very dreadful to——"

But the ways of the elder sisters were not to be disturbed by this wandering sheep, who was so ready to break down fences in her downright fashion.

"Nancy is a thorough Bohemian," said Griselda, with a laugh,

"What nonsense she is talking—how she *does* run on!" added Dorigen impatiently.

"Oh!" exclaimed Nancy, this time beneath her breath, "I might talk for ever, and never make them understand."

From a glance the sisters gave me, I felt like an interloper, and wished with all my heart that my patient, who had left the room for a few minutes, would come back and give a turn to the conversation. It was not the first time I had been thrown among people between whom there existed the closest ties of blood, but who, as Nancy expressed it, "did not understand each other." It was as if they were in such different planes of existence that no words could describe their thoughts to each other, and no analogies make their ideas mutually comprehensible. I was certain that something unavowed, causing pain and anxiety, and leading Nancy to irritate her relations unconsciously, was at the bottom of the excitement which she occasionally displayed. But the girl's disinterested selfishness and desire to conciliate made her anxious to dispel any appearance of mystery.

"I have not complained—have I?" was the only explanation she gave me when I alluded to her desire to settle in Halstead as soon as possible. "I did not mean to say anything about other people. But if I could get away to the country quickly, because—because—oh, the air of this place!"

She paused a moment to collect herself, and then said more quietly:

"I think the country would do my father a world of good, and I am longing after it too. If we wait here any longer, we shall be drawn into fresh expenses. He will never get well here—you have said it yourself. And if the wrench is to come, it will be better to have it over."

I blamed myself unreasonably after this for the fact that there was still a good deal of delay. I could not divest myself of a sort of idea that the girl was passing through some crisis, and that things were by no means so easy with her as she tried to pretend them to be when these fits of excitement were over, and she was her bright natural self.

She had certainly sufficient excuse for taking things to heart without my suspecting other hidden causes. There was a good deal of unkind talking about the Langridges. Some people said that the artist had been cheated; others, who were nearer the truth, thought he had simply been extravagant. But all acknowledged that his ruin had been brought upon himself by his own imprudence. Further than this Mrs. Grundy could scarcely venture, for Nancy, who had a horror of debt, had taken pre-

cautions, which seemed to be out of keeping with her tender age, to ensure the payment of the creditors to the last farthing. And, if her father had an objection to some of her drastic measures, it would have been an atrocious libel to say that he was not honourable.

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II.

THE couple of weeks which elapsed after her sisters were married, before all could be fully settled, perhaps accounted for the fact that Nancy looked worn and weary, having done her best to protect the name of which she had once been proud.

I was struck by the change in her appearance when at last, all the arrangements having been made for the sale of the expensive curiosities which had been amassed during a lifetime, Langridge and his Cordelia (as in my own heart I had now learnt to call her) came to settle at Halstead.

There was a weary look about Nancy, for which the anxieties still weighing upon her scarcely accounted. Her worst troubles, as I tried cheerily to assure her, were over. Her father, with the natural elasticity of his nature, was already recovering from the first shock of his misfortunes, and her housekeeping worries were comfortably ended, the maidservants having shown an hysterical willingness to take warning directly there was a doubt as to how their wages would be paid.

Her sisters wrote satisfactory accounts of their own doings, like the easy-going, worldly women that they were, who, having feathered their own nests, were determined to enjoy themselves. But all these things were so many burdens taken off her young shoulders. And, proud as I was of our pretty village, I was somewhat disappointed at the dejected, pathetic look in the girl's face when I first went to visit her at the little cottage which I and my wife had chosen for Basil Langridge in a beautiful situation commanding views of sea and moor.

"I am afraid it will seem to a man like your father the quintessence of commonplace. But I comfort myself by reflecting that the *scenery* is not commonplace," I said, as Nancy met me at the door of the cottage with swathes of some woollen, cloudlike material wound about her head and shoulders, for it was in the month of January and the air was sharp.

She did not seem to be in a hurry to usher me in to the patient, but stood drawing breaths of the fresh, pure air and letting her eyes rove over the vast expanse of sea and moor.

"The land looks almost as illimitable as the sea," she said, in answer to my remark, letting her large gray eyes wander with a yearning look over the moorland, which was only varied by little pyramids of furze or bossy projections of the ground.

"Yes, the wildness of it is rather oppressive at first, but you will soon get used to it; and you look as if you had been shut up too much lately within four walls."

She nodded, but she did not answer, as she still stood looking, not now at the moor, but at the waste of tossing water with a band of golden light near the horizon, and over all a heavy blue-black curtain which was dropping sullenly, as if envious to cover it.

"Ah," I said, following the direction of her eyes, "I am glad you are pleased; but this is nothing of a sunset. Now and then during the year you will see the whole place transfigured, with the atmosphere near the horizon in distinct strata of illumination, the yellow light resting on a fiery bar, just as if the whole universe were having its death-fire, to be followed by —what d'ye call it?—a sort of—phœnix resurrection."

I had succeeded in my purpose, which was to see her lips take merry curves, instead of that droop of the turned-down edges of her mouth which gave it such a piteous look, and which I thought unnatural.

"Doctor Meredith, I did not know you were so fond of tropes."

"Yes, and quips and cranks too, my child, if they will do you any good. We doctors have the poetry taken out of us, that's the reason I word it so lamely; but poetry is to be found anywhere, especially in the country."

"Ah! but when *he* cannot see it, what good is it to *me?*" she asked, raising her eyes to the darkening sky with a sort of shudder.

I tried to cheer her, and pointed to the disc of the moon, which was already shining like silver in another part of the sky, and was making efforts to illuminate the floating clouds.

Her nature was so impressionable that she burst into a rippling laugh.

"Ah! I see—another simile!" Then, with an instant change—"Hush! we must go to him. But don't speak of the sunset colour; it looks brown, like a sort of yellowish fog, to him. He is perfectly unaware of its beauty. I think it kindest not to tell him."

"How else can I test his recovery?"

"Oh! it would be cruel to ask him questions, cruel to let him know what he has lost. You must not be surprised," she

continued, as she led the way into the house, "but he complains of the dulness of the prospect—of the leaden sea, of the unchanging clouds. And yet he used to be struck dumb with admiration by a scene like this. You would not think it, but I have heard him complain when other people talked, as if no language could reach the thoughts which ought to be expressed by such loveliness."

"Then he must have complained a good deal amidst the eternal chatter of his other women-folk," I could not help thinking, rather cynically, though I remarked aloud: "He has been an enthusiast in his day—a bit of a poet as well as a painter."

"Hush!" she answered again, with her finger on her lips, as she led me into a room where the atmosphere was rather stuffy, with a heaped-up fire, and curtains closely drawn; for Langridge no longer cared when the darkness began or ended.

An impatient, querulous face, no longer young, peered at me through a cloud of tobacco smoke. The peevish lines on it had increased.

"A disappointing place!" he said gruffly, "I won't say a hole of a place, but I *had* hoped for clear skies, and you have as much d—d fog as we have in town. And, doctor, you must admit, it is bitterly cold."

I was going to tell him that the ugliness was merely subjective; and that the cold was a healthy cold which would brace him and do him good. Under other circumstances I should have been downright angry, and, as it was, I was rather put out, when Nancy arrested me with a gesture.

"He does not know how blind he is!" she whispered to me, and then, throwing herself on a stool at his feet in a pretty, caressing attitude, she began fondling the limp hands which lay aimlessly on his knees.

"Dear," she said, in her tender voice, "you and I will have plenty of time to read. I want to improve my mind. I am dreadfully ignorant. Doctor Meredith, don't you see he has brought all the standard authors which used to be looked upon as sacred?—papa's books—oh, how I shall read aloud to him! I used to have such a little time for enlisting such celebrities as the companions of my unoccupied hours—but now we shall have to originate new ideas for new paintings to keep up the old name till the dear father is himself again—isn't it so, darling?"

"Women were never meant to originate ideas—the best they can do is to follow up those of other people," he answered ungraciously, in accordance with a theory of his that daughters were born to look pretty and sons to cultivate their intellects.

"You will spoil the brightness of your eyes if you pore over print."

Certainly this man had done well to give his girls Chaucerian names, as he meant them never to take the initiative. Even the ideal woman painted by Wordsworth would have been far too independent for him.

"Oh, my eyesight will do well enough, and if my ideas *are* like capsules, never combining, never splitting (there's a simile for Doctor Meredith; do you know, dear, I have found out he is fond of similes?), I'll do my best to submit them to *your* manipulating intellect," she answered quickly, and so readily that any one might have credited her with sarcasm who had not looked at her and seen how, beneath her feeble attempts at humour, she was terribly in earnest.

"And you are going to have a studio!—we are fitting one up for him," she added, in an explanatory tone, as two bright drops, all unbeknown to him, fell from her eyes as she turned to me. "You know he *could* not exist without painting. And, dear, the thoughts which you always have within you and which clamour for expression, how splendidly they will come out on one of those great, big canvases! They have sent us one, doctor," she continued, again directing her conversation to me, "almost as big for the room upstairs as the Vicar of Wakefield's family picture. And Doctor Thornley says my father may still paint a little, using long brushes—we must expect that the work will be a trifle coarse. And we have found a room with a capital light for a studio—haven't we, father?"

"It is perfectly useless to try to make him understand that he does not see colours as well as we do, and Doctor Thornley said it would be best to humour him," she continued, in a vigorous protest to me, as soon as she could get an opportunity for taking me aside.

Of course she did not know that, according to all the traditions of a profession which surrounds itself, spider-like, with an elaborate network of etiquette, as if on purpose to let the public put its foot into a skilfully constructed web, I ought to have flown into a rage when Dr. Thornley's opinions were quoted at me.

"You see the gift of colour used to be my father's to a pre-eminent degree, and it would be cruel to tell him he no longer possesses it," she urged, with such eloquent force that, though I felt a little awkward about it, I found myself taking her cue like an old fool.

"A *little!*" I reflected. "Well, it must be a *very* little work he may do. It is the nervous system which is over-

strained, and perhaps the further strain on the nerves of having to bear contradiction might be the more harmful of the two. Get him out as much as possible. Don't let him mope indoors."

I trusted more to the fresh, pure air quickening the blood in his veins, and giving him restful sleep, than to any nostrums or spectacles which I might be able to recommend.

But I confess I thought Nancy's precautions over-elaborate.

"There was always a good deal of humbug in poor Langridge's character, the consequence of his thinking himself such a genius, and so immeasurably superior to other people. As to the girl, good as she is, she is a trifle high-strung," I said a little huffily to myself, when I called another day, and was solemnly told I must not interrupt one of the artist's inspirations.

I was shown into the studio, and there was something pathetic in seeing the once celebrated man standing by his easel in an old velveteen coat, peering into the canvas with eyes which were dimly lit, and face stern and pale, angry even at my interruption, and as self-confident as ever. Standing within a yard of him, I could see the picture, the outlines of which were tolerably good, but which were smeared, as it seemed to my unpractised eyes, with the queerest of pigments, and the oddest combination of colour gone mad. It looked like the phantom or the delirium of a painting.

A frown darkened his face as I approached him.

"Every minute is precious," he said, speaking with unusual vehemence and a little more self-consciousness than usual, vain as he always was.

Stifling an impulse to laugh, I stooped down to examine other canvases, some of which leant against an impromptu screen, and others were heaped against the wall. Judge of my surprise when I found that the colours had been altered in one of the very pictures which had struck me as most inharmonious when I had seen it weeks before, during the "private view." All that was then crude had been delicately toned down. The reds and violets were no longer jarring; the yellows had been mellowed. The landscape was, in fact, distinguished by much of that purity of tint and subtle gradation of tone which had been characteristic of Langridge in the days when he had worked best. I glanced at Nancy, and could scarcely stifle an exclamation of surprise when I saw, to my astonishment, that a frown like her father's darkened her brow. She motioned me to silence with a quick, imploring gesture.

"Don't say anything about it—it will be the worst thing you can possibly do," she whispered, when, under pretence of also

examining the pictures, she stooped so that her girlish face was on a level with mine.

"Not say anything about it!" I smiled to myself. It seemed that this little self-willed maiden had formed an exaggerated estimate of her father's nervousness. Yet to humour her, I kept silence, saying to myself that his recovery would now probably be rapid. But, on the contrary, nothing could be slower or more disappointing than the perversity of his ailment.

As the months passed on, and, instead of the crimson hips shining through the snow, the gelatinous buds and downy leaves appeared on the trees—marsh-marigolds burning in the hollows of the copses—it seemed to me that Langridge's eyes grew dimmer. And as I knew that his failing sight meant the failure of a great hope, and that his remaining term of life had gained value in his eyes simply on account of his increasing ambition, I could make an excuse for him, even in his morbid ideas.

I pitied the poor fellow, deprived as he was of society, and with more ample time to reflect on his past mistakes. But I was inclined to smile in spite of my pity when I found that he was suddenly overwhelmed by a feverish desire for posthumous fame.

"I want my name to *live*," he said to me, in a curious state of excitement, one day.

"What's the good?" I am afraid I answered, in rather a damping way; "what will be the good of it to *you* when you yourself are dead?"

He began quoting something about "joining the choir invisible," and I am afraid he found me a very unsympathetic and irreverent listener.

"Humph!" I answered, when he had done, "it's odd to me how this craving for posthumous fame is curiously enough to be found in the minds of men who have the notion that death ends all as far as the individual is concerned! Well, perhaps I am thick-headed, but I never could understand how men gifted with logical powers could picture themselves to their own imagination as actually living while at the same time they confidently assert they will be dead. How can a fellow enjoy posthumous fame when he himself no longer exists?"

Basil Langridge, who had talked lightly of giving up the substance, was yet ready to strain every nerve for the sake of the shadow.

"You do not understand—how it was one of my dreams from boyhood to paint something by which my name should be handed down to posterity."

I did not answer. It seemed to me egoistical rubbish. And,

whether it was his dream or not, it was certain that it was further than ever from being realised. As to the work on the large canvas, though the first sketch had been good and spirited, his sight had so failed him for anything like accuracy of colour, that the painting became feebler the more he proceeded with it.

"A symphony in shade? Something of the blottesque school?" I asked, nervously apprehensive when I was requested to give an opinion on it. "Ah, I am told that sort of thing is fashionable."

I might have added that it was "amusing," like a sort of guessing game, but I changed the word to "suggestive," as I noticed Nancy's gray eyes fixed reproachfully on me.

I wondered if he was aware of his own powerlessness to work out anything to perfection. I felt vexed with the fellow's self-assurance and the daughter's surveillance, and for the life of me could not prevent a touch of independence cropping up.

"Dear me!" I added, putting on my glasses to peer at it again, "I see now how it gives the dim, religious feeling—it is right of you to steer clear of the purely conventional—one can observe with half an eye that *this* was not done to sell!"

"Indeed!" he said, with a sudden perception of something which struck him in my tone, as if my words had recalled considerations which made him uncomfortable.

I had not dared to look at Nancy. But an inflection in her voice as she remarked, clearly and resolutely, "The picture has its faults, but you have done right in commending it," made me remember how in attempting to destroy her father's good opinion of himself, I was hurting another innocent creature whose susceptibilities were a hundred times more keen.

"Dim religious feeling!" repeated Nancy, in that tone which made me know how the necessary knife which scarcely grazed her father's soul had penetrated hers. "Dear, never you mind! Dr. Meredith's words make me think of Browning's. Don't you remember?

> The sanctuary's gloom at least shall ward
> Vain tongues from where my picture stands apart."

It was nonsense. But I could scarcely be angry with her, when she looked bravely at me and misappropriated the lines so steadily. The simplicity of her voice and manner could always carry her through an emergency of this sort.

"Have I vexed you?" I could not help saying, as she followed me to the door. "Would you have had me say to your father, 'It is most masterful, most beautiful. I for one see no

falling off, only a higher aspiration'? Would not that be humbug?"

She did not answer me, except by a look of pained surprise which seemed to say, "How could you?" I really think she had argued herself into the belief that her father would yet accomplish the great things he prophesied.

Indeed, as if to prove that my criticism had given him a sort of impetus, and that he might yet be able to ensure the sort of perpetuity which he fancied for his works, the very next time I saw the Magnum Opus, I could have declared that it was bewitched. There were still technical flaws and imperfections in it—a sort of semi-utterance about it, if one might use such an expression. Here and there were vexing accessories of curiously odd touches, like flies in the apothecary's ointment. But the whole thing was so altered and improved, the colouring again so revolutionised, that I no longer wondered the daughter's heart should be quickened with hope.

"He alternates—no doubt of it," I admitted to her, as I stood looking at the painting. "And yet do you not notice that here and there the painting is so crude one might imagine he had forgotten much since the time when he received the first public nod of approval, and that was years ago? And yet, when a man can forget himself, and do good work like this, in spite of his dimness of eyesight——"

I stopped, fairly puzzled, but she passionately finished my sentence:

"Then you can no longer blame him for wishing to give permanence to some of the beautiful things in creation."

"After all, it can only be a transitory permanence; but how can he *see* to do this?" I added, still puzzled, perhaps more so by the strange light which was shining in her face.

"You talked," she said, "of forgetting oneself in one's subject." And her frank tone was such as to disarm suspicion.

I had never seen her look more weary. There were black circles beneath her eyes which I attributed to her vexation that I should have seemed to discourage her father.

Was it possible that, just as there was wonderful music which a deaf Beethoven could still drink in with the spiritual ear and interpret to listening crowds whose applause was to him as a mimic show; so there might be exquisite sights which the hand of a half-blind man—having not yet lost its cunning—might depict to other eyes less favoured than his once were? I had a natural itching to continue the experiment, and to place him, if possible, under the most favourable conditions for it. I no longer felt inclined to laugh at him when he replied:

"If I could only paint something by which my name may be handed down to posterity."

And yet a little while ago I would not have given a fig for what this man could teach posterity. Having been associated with him constantly since he came to Halstead, I had come to think that whatever had been in him once was like a vein of rich metal worked out. I thought now with shame of what I had once said to Jenny, that there was no more at the back of him than at the back of a looking-glass, with this difference, that he had not a grain of quicksilver in him.

I was so interested in my new experiment that I no longer attempted to soothe him into being contented with his past achievements. I did all I could to tempt him to take rambles with his daughter. But, seeing that he must be delicately handled, I no longer objected to constant fetchings and carryings of artist's implements from Blackquay. I quite fell into Nancy's view that there must be no more quizzings or feeble jokes at her father's expense. The result was that the little money which remained to him he frittered away on the pigments he wasted, or big canvases which he covered in a way wonderful to behold. The very ardour of his desire, the smouldering fire of his baffled genius, as I had now come to think, seemed to nerve his hand, and to kindle light in his dim eye, giving some idea of the reserve of force which I began to hope had been imprisoned within him like the bottled genii in the "Arabian Nights."

For some time after this, in my determination to watch the case, I experienced a singular revolution of hopes and fancies. I had concluded, as an explanation of the vile painting of certain details, that memory and technical education had failed my patient. But, oddly contradictory as my discovery was, I suddenly found these were the very points in which he was most strong.

One singular thing was, as Nancy observed, that—although during the many hours which, in deference to my wish, they spent in wandering by the sea-shore, Langridge might be supposed to make observations on the rocky coast or the changing tide—when he came home he would often seize his brushes and commence some wild composition, which had no connection with what he had seen. So clever were the outlines of some of these pictures, that, if we could have induced him to keep to black and white, they would have been little less than fascinating. I am afraid to describe them at any length, lest I should weary you. Suffice it to say that Langridge drew *not* what he had seen at Halstead—which was probably to him as a misty vision, with little that could be attractive—but what was envisaged before

him by a faculty of developing mental imagery which was in his case so strong that the bygone scenes recalled were much more clearly defined than anything in the present. I have often thought that the pre-eminence of many painters, musicians, and writers may be due to the vividness with which they can reproduce the past.

I remember on one occasion being consulted by a parson who was troubled by a hesitation in his delivery caused by the painful accuracy with which he could visualise his manuscript with its erasures and alterations, even when he had taken the precaution of learning the sermon by heart. Now in Langridge's case everything was tolerably defined *but* the colouring. Had his art been mono-chromatic there was little in it even now which would have exposed him to adverse criticism. Weak as his sight still was, the lines and designs were often excellent. But, whenever I found him at his work, I was bound to admit that his colouring was simply detestable. And then perhaps if I called again after the interval of a day or two the picture seemed to have undergone some undefinable change—to have been passed, as it were, through a mysterious alembic—gaining in delicacy of handling as well as in colour. The problem baffled me. It was in vain that I questioned Nancy. Was it possible that the lost powers returned to the man during the hours of the night? Did he rise and retouch his pictures while others were asleep?

But to the girl it was evidently no subject to be discussed. It puzzled me to understand how, though she spent so many hours in the open air, there was often such a weary look about her eyes. She still dressed unlike other people. That was her father's fancy, and it made her look curiously out of place in the poverty-stricken rooms. At the beginning she had adapted herself readily to the change.

Pleasures newly-found are sweet,

as Wordsworth says," quoted Langridge patronisingly, with that assumption of superiority which had always characterised him when he spoke of his daughter. I had remarked that he thought little of Nancy's mental calibre, with that consciousness of power on his own side which is at the root of tyranny as well as of chivalry. "Let her expand like the flower," he said affectedly to me one day. "I would not have her bothered even with music" (the fact being that his nerves resented the sound of a piano), "and I keep every trouble from her—grief would kill that child."

III.

As the spring advanced and they spent hours on the moors, I remember how Langridge told me that he would not have had one hair changed in Nancy or one freckle the less—that he liked to see her as far as possible a healthy, happy, country-bred girl, fearing neither the sun nor the wind. It was curious that at the same time she seemed so tired. Her occasional fits of merry light-heartedness appeared now to have entirely deserted her, her wilful high spirits to have vanished for ever.

Well, I was so accustomed to slip into the midst of a tragedy and to take up the thread of some strange story as well as I could, without knowing the beginning of the maze or guessing the end, that it did not surprise me very much when one day—entering the garden by one of the side-walks which had been for some time a convenient short cut for me, and being concealed by the leaves which now thickly covered the trees—I heard the clear tones of Nancy's voice :

"It was not entirely my fault. I was bewildered with trouble, but I felt *then* that I should lower myself by consenting to have anything to do with such a compact. I ought to have been firmer in the beginning."

"Ah! give me a little hope," said another, deeper voice, "*I* am not responsible for those circumstances."

"No, but you have been mixed up with them."

"That is not my fault."

"Not your fault? I consider it is so much your fault that a consent extorted from me can hardly be binding on my conscience."

"Let us try together if we cannot help your father."

I drew a deep breath, then coughed and struck my stick upon the ground with the hope of making the speakers aware of my proximity. I did not know if my device was successful or not. But the voices were dropped into a lower key, and footsteps departed by another path which opened on the main road. I, unfortunately, had approached through the kitchen garden. And though it was tolerably often that questions non-medical mixed themselves up with my practice and presented themselves to me for solution, I had seldom been brought in contact with a more awkward state of things than when Nancy, flushed and miserable, but with a certain purposeful air about her, met me face to face.

When she saw who it was, she gave a stifled exclamation, and then said, rallying herself :

"Oh, Doctor Meredith, I am so glad it was only *you*."

I could not help smiling, for I was old enough to be her grandfather. Circumstances, as I said before, had been so ordered as to make me the friend of the family, though my medical services had been rendered to her father only.

"I am a great blunderer," I said, as I advised her to try to be calm, and not to trouble about what I had heard. "One would think I wore galoshes, or had what novelists call a 'cat-like' tread."

For her face was suffused with blushes, her eyes with starting tears, and she had the evident intention of appealing to me.

"As if it mattered at all! as if it were not all the same as double-Dutch to a white-headed veteran like me," I began, as I looked at her wet, downcast eyes. "If it had not been for the fear that you would *hear* me running, or that my old legs would be stiff, I should certainly have run away."

"I am so glad you did not run," she said, with one of those choking attempts at laughter which told me how her heart was beating, and opposite feelings struggling for the mastery. "How droll you would have looked running! And then," looking at me with wide-open eyes and one of those rapid alternations from mirth to seriousness which had always been characteristic of her, "people, you know, don't believe in special Providences —but perhaps it was a good Providence which sent you?"

"I don't pretend to be an oracle of wisdom," I said, shaking my head. "But if you do not want an oracle, only a friend——"

Somehow I could not finish the sentence. For, though I was anxious that the girl should be helped out of any dilemma, I was equally conscious that my professional visit to her father should not be interfered with.

Putting two and two together I thought I could guess without any great exertion of oracular wisdom that some sort of thumb-screw was being applied to her, and I very much wished there was some older woman to whom she could appeal to prevent her rights of womanhood from being trampled upon. But this was not a matter on which *I* could enlarge, so I contented myself with saying vaguely:

"As a friend, I may tell you that whatever trouble there is, you ought to be able to find your way out of it."

"*Ought?*" she repeated. "It is very well to say ought;" and the tone of her voice seemed suddenly to have become desperate.

I ignored the fact that there was a wild look in her face, that she was drawing her breath in sobs, and that she had to struggle with herself before she could add, a little to my relief:

"Dr. Meredith, I would do almost anything to help my father. But it is money—money—you know, which always makes such trouble in this world—you have been so kind to us—you have given your valuable services for nothing—but I do not know even if *that* is right, and we cannot live without money."

I nodded, after muttering "Pshaw!" at her allusion to my services.

"And then—and then," she continued, still speaking in broken sentences, and with evident constraint, "if I cannot raise some money by a certain time—and that time has nearly elapsed—they will say I am bound by a promise which I cannot carry out. It seems to me it will be better to bear any misery."

It was quite sufficient for her to allude in a vague way to this promise. I could see that she trusted me not to question her about it, and at the same time I could also see that the ordeal to which she had been subjected during the last few months, and which had probably now come to a crisis, whatever that ordeal was, would soon become too much for her fragile body.

"This is a question of casuistry," I answered, trying to smile, "fitter for a lawyer than a poor old doctor. I should be inclined to tell my own daughter to cut the Gordian knot, if I had a daughter, and if she were in a web of that kind. Two wrongs don't make a right."

"Then how can I make money—can I sell the pictures?"

"We can take one or two over to Blackquay. But what will your father say? Is it fair to him to palm them off on the public, or to sell them away dirt cheap that folks may say they have bought a Langridge?" I asked, sorely puzzled.

It was ridiculous how unpractical I was when it came to actual advice—how altogether unequal to the small pleasantries and fits of amusing talk on which I was accustomed to fall back when I wanted to cheer a woman.

"I will think it over, and let you know about it—we must not act on impulse," I said cheerily, as I waved my hand to her, and walked on to the house.

Somehow the girl's face haunted me. The contours of it had become pinched and worn. Her restless eyes betrayed the agitation of a harrowed mind. She had never thought it necessary to consult me about her health, but everything about her betrayed to me that she was passing through a crisis, and that, if this sort of thing were to go on much longer, her strength might become exhausted.

*Her* trouble might be one more fit for a woman than a man

to deal with, and yet, as Nancy had not given me the right to do so, I could not even appeal to Jenny. I had no such scruples respecting her father. It is a not unusual experience among sick people that weakness will make them garrulous, and, in the prostration of their bodily strength, they will sometimes tell us more than they would otherwise about their private affairs. I need not say that such confidences which come out bit by bit are treated by us as sacred ; that we make no comment on them generally, and that, if they should help us in any way in the analysis of a case, we still keep them to ourselves, not telling any other human being if we happen to be in possession of certain facts undesirable to make public. Our usual rule in such a case is to act the part of dummies ; nothing is so obnoxious to us as interference.

And yet I never felt more inclined to speak a bit of my mind than when I found Basil Langridge irritable, discontented, and ready to make no secret of the causes of his irritation. It was, after all, very natural that he should confide in me. He was not on the same familiar terms with any one else at Halstead. And, even if what he wished to tell me would have been better kept secret, I doubt if, in his present state of feeble irritation, he would have found it possible to keep it back.

I saw that I was expected to be astonished when he explained that his daughter Nancy was ruining her own prospects, and guilty of the utmost cruelty to himself, by refusing to marry a man who was as rich as Crœsus, and who had everything in this world to recommend him.

"It all comes of her whims," he explained, almost with a whimper. "The girl can see plainly enough how fond I am of her, and how it would relieve my anxieties to see her comfortably settled in life ; but I have never urged the match, though she can see how I have suffered mentally as well as physically from the ugliness of my surroundings. There is nothing else before us but misery and deterioration in a struggle that is shocking, Meredith, absolutely shocking. What might show character in the girl at other times becomes now an obstinate craze."

The selfish exaggeration of all this sort of talk, while the man who had been so ruined by the artistic luxuries of his former life had, after all, a comfortable roof over his head, with even a bit of garden, made me so irate that I relieved my feelings by clenching my hand as Langridge continued, peering at me with his dim eyes till I could almost think they sparkled :

"And to bring up against him the fact that at one time in his life, when he was successful in business, he did a little

sharp practice! I tell you that even then he paid a high price for my pictures. And she can do anything with him now—make him go to church and say his prayers if she pleases—turn him as easily as possible round her little finger. He is absolutely her slave—he with all his thousands. I dare say you now, in your quiet life, never experienced such violent agitations, but I have seen that fellow as timid as a girl, not daring to raise his eyes from his shoes in her presence."

I answered with a smile that I could quite believe it, though I was secretly nettled at his cool assumption that I had known no such feelings in my quiet life.

It was just because I *did* believe in pure human love as the most heaven-sent gift ever vouchsafed to man that I felt it necessary to say something, however much I might have preferred to assume indifference.

"I tell you what it is," I said. "No one has been more ready to acknowledge than I that the mission of Art has been to raise us above the sordid cares, the pettinesses and worries of daily life. But, if the search after beauty is so to debilitate us that we can't live without luxury, and when a man is 'left and abandoned of his velvet friends,' he must capitulate, instead of showing his independence, it seems to me that Art is not such a fine thing after all. It may enervate us, and lower us instead of elevating."

He stared at me in astonishment as I continued:

"Who would have thought that your courage could desert you so easily—that you should not know that in this child whom you are so ready to blame you have a self-sacrificing, noble daughter, ready to lay down her life for you?"

He said something in a low voice about wishing to keep her from poverty. I thought there was compunction in the tone, and I added:

"It is better not to trust to any false hopes. As to securing *her* from poverty, if she is to be secured from such things, she must be exempted from the common lot of humanity. And I have heard you talk as if it would be a very unworthy ambition for a woman to wish to be out of the common. Don't be afraid. I know few people better able to meet poverty than this daughter of yours."

I had spoken somewhat strongly, but it was for Nancy's sake. She had been enduring lately at the highest pitch, and I could see that the strain put upon her was so great there might be fear of the machinery breaking down. I had been thinking so much of the gentle-souled creature who could meet a man under the most adverse circumstances as she had met me that

day, with frank, unmoved face, and I was so resenting the sort of pressure which had been brought to bear upon her, that perhaps I was a little merciless to the father. Anyhow, I smote him hip and thigh, and was somewhat alarmed when I was called suddenly to see him that night. It was an accident which might have been terrible. For under the influence of an excited impulse, with utter forgetfulness of that dimness of vision in which he had never thoroughly believed, he had blundered through a French window which led out into the garden. The sound of the broken glass had fortunately been heard by Nancy, who, finding her father with an ugly cut in one of his arms, had shown that she possessed that *vōs* for which I should readily have credited her. Ambulance classes had not then been instituted, nor need I go into details about the girl's ready aptness in staunching a too copious flow of blood. She simply used that common-sense which asserted itself in spite of her shocked and scattered mood, and I found her when I called kneeling on the ground beside her father grasping the arm tightly with a grasp which had never relaxed, though her attitude was cramped, and the effort must have been difficult.

"You have done the right thing," I said, as I attended to the wound. "But you must be faint yourself."

"Not faint—only a little tired," she answered, as she determined to sit up for that night.

It was greatly against my wish to let her do so, but they could not afford to pay for any other sick-nurse, and she promised to lie down towards the morning.

I came back at an early hour—the patient was doing well, though I determined to keep him for a few days in bed. I had a double purpose in determining this, thinking of the perfect rest for his eyes.

I had sent Nancy up to get the necessary sleep, but was surprised as I went down the stairs to notice the morning light streaming from the open door of the room which was called the studio. I retraced my steps, intending to close it very softly, knowing how particular Langridge was that no servant should meddle with the things in this room, and was more surprised to see a busy worker at the easel.

All that had been enigmatical to me was explained at once. Old Langridge was asleep. From the door of his adjacent bedroom we could hear him snoring regularly. But I looked with a mixture of consternation and admiration at this other delicate hand which was retouching his work. Now it was altering the tones of a slight water-colour sketch, washing in the colours

with a rich full brush in free, copious flow, and now the dainty fingers seemed to be equally at home with oils. She worked rapidly, anxiously, never looking behind her—as if she counted the moments she could seize for her work—and I stood watching her for some time holding my breath.

I did not like to startle her, but as I stood watching her I could understand for the first time how hard work and want of sleep had sharpened the angles of her pretty cheeks.

"Miss Langridge," I said at last, putting up my hand to caution her as she turned with a start. I need not have feared. Her anxiety about her father was always uppermost in her mind. And though the colour suddenly flushed the pallid cheeks, rising from neck to brow, she simply dropped her brush; she did not cry out. "So this," I said, "is the riddle which I could not unravel."

"It was nothing that I *could* be wrong in concealing from you," she answered, as soon as she recovered her powers of speech. "My father did not know I could paint."

"Ah," I reflected, speaking my thoughts aloud, "he did not approve of women painting." And then I remembered and somewhat resented the patronising way in which I had heard him quote from a poem which just then had been published,

> Women are weak,
> And love of all things to be passive,

and I asked, somewhat bluntly, "Why did you want to do all this besides your domestic work, and let him take the credit for it?"

She laughed. "Oh, *my* paintings leave a good deal to be desired. *His* imaginings are the true work, I was simply trying to improve the colour."

"You do yourself injustice."

"Indeed I do not. I never learnt to paint. I have watched his way of doing it since I was a little child, and I practised when I could, and treasured up what he taught others. But whenever I tried to paint a little by myself in my spare hours, I always ended by tearing up my pictures in discouragement."

Well, I did not know much about the technicalities of art or the regular training required for artists, but this seemed to me a part of the self-distrust I had noticed in her before—a self-distrust which had been inculcated from childhood, and which retarded her development.

"This accounts," I said, after a pause, "for your pale cheeks and the black circles under your eyes. Now I dare say you will be very much surprised, but I am going to take it upon myself

to send you instantly to bed. Then I will take some of these pictures to Blackquay, and see if something can be done about their sale."

It was surprising how she obeyed me, being, in fact, too over-tired to rebel.

"Don't you suppose that I was rather tired of my secret?—but there is no occasion to tell my father," she said, a few days afterwards, when, with a shade of almost maternal tenderness in her voice, she told him herself that some of his pictures had been sold.

He asked abruptly, almost passionately, how much money they had fetched. And hearing that the dealers were asking for more, he remarked, with a return of his former vanity, that it would soon be no longer necessary for him to paint such "pot-boilers." "The public," he remarked, with evident satisfaction, "were always ready to veer round to the winning side."

I made the excuse of his injured arm for keeping him for some time in his own rooms, with the combined advantage of softened light for the eyes, and rest for the whole bodily system. During this time, all the softening and sweetening influences of his daughter's nature had their due effect on his nerves.

"Are you satisfied? Is there nothing else you want?" she would ask him, with every tone of endearment.

"Ah," she would say, taking his hand and kissing it, "whom do you think I could possibly care about but you? And to think you could positively have wanted me to leave you!"

The climax was when the temporary colour-blindness, produced by the disturbance of the circulation in the brain, disappeared as Basil Langridge recovered his health. How quietly he took his daughter's handiwork for his own! He simply remarked that some of the finishing touches were crude, as his recovery was promoted by judicious exercise of the impaired faculty. And, as his colour perception returned to him, I noticed that he seemed to be more than a little puzzled. Some of his supposed pictures afforded him matter for amusement, and even surprise. How distressing the sight of them would have been to him had they remained in their first condition, I am unable to guess. I only know that the assistance which an inexperienced girl had rendered him escaped detection in a remarkable way. It was her own wish that he should never know how much he was indebted to her.

# MISS FARLEY'S COMPANION

## I.

THE story which I have to tell you now is of many years ago. I am afraid to think how many. That, perhaps, has accounted for my putting it off to one of the last. Unless, indeed, I have been deferring what is most interesting to myself, on the principle of a child trying to reserve its sweetmeat.

On a November day, rather more than forty years ago, soon after I came to Halstead, I found the whole neighbourhood in a little stir of excitement, because an old, rambling, red-brick house which stood in its own grounds, halfway between Halstead and Blackquay, had been taken by a rich young lady from London. It was not only that, what with the depressing weather, the low state of trade, and the general conviction that the country was going to rack and ruin, we were sadly in want of something to cheer us this winter. But strange and piquant stories had reached us about the independence of this young lady. She was clever, she was lovely; she meant to dispense with any other chaperon than an aged housekeeper, and to have no other gentlewoman to live with her but one who was younger than herself, and whom she had taken out of kindness as a companion.

The stir of excitement increased when Miss Farley's furniture began to arrive in huge vans from town. For soon it was evident that she meant to transform the dowdy old house. It was the sort of place which, in the present day, could be utilised for all kinds of experiments from an idiot asylum to a hydropathic establishment. But people were not so enterprising then, and it had been left to be inhabited by nothing but chilly ghosts, or given over to the depredations of rats and mice. Treasures of pottery,

bric-à-brac, paintings by old and young masters, books, china, rare old cabinets and musical instruments struck amazement into the hearts of the Halsteadians as the vans were unloaded. And soon it was not only evident that Miss Farley was going to cover staid walls with articles of glowing colour and rich ornamentation, but that she was intending to make havoc of all our old traditions, just as she had transformed the old house from floor to rooftree. Those were days in which men talked about the delightful simplicity of unreasoning womanhood, and when a scholar made a point of marrying a fool because he declared he was attracted by his opposite pole. Well, we are changing all that now. The position of women at present is being, as it were, revised, and after awhile, I am told, a new edition is to be brought out, containing all the advantages of the original gilt-edged thing, with corrections in the type, and good, serviceable binding. I am afraid I am old-fashioned in being a little nervous about the improvement. Already I see a falling-off from the gallantry of my young days, and feel like the little boy who asked his mother if she expected to keep the right side of the pavement when she got all her rights. But we must live and learn.

Rachel Farley was one of the few women who were pioneers of the new movement. Rich and beautiful, she had hitherto rejected all idea of marriage, declaring that she should be no sooner engaged to a man than she would be overwhelmed with a sense of desolation. The more amiable, the more self-sacrificing he might appear to be, the more certain she was she would hate him, if ever she came to be tied to him.

"A perfect husband would make me die of *ennui*, and an imperfect one I should be sure to despise. Intellectual men, as a rule, pride themselves on their supposed superiority—and the others! Well, I am certain I should not be engaged a month without wanting to run away from the man of my choice."

These opinions had preceded her, because they had been continually expressed. A woman whom everybody courted, and who yet could say with conviction, "The kindest husband would pall on me. I am certain I should be tired of him in a month," was at that time at least an anomaly. We all looked forward to seeing her, just as we looked forward to exhibitions of so-called "unicorns" at a fair, the more so that she had paid us a compliment. She preferred our little hamlet to the great gay London which Charles Lamb called "a perpetual pantomime and masquerade, its beauties fresh, warm, and green, its inventions of men and assemblies of men."

Young, beautiful, and intelligent, with an intelligence which

report said knew no limits, she had yet confessed to a longing for a whiff of peat smoke, a breath of sea air, and an absurd preference for gorse and ling, when she ought to have been delighted with knowing herself the cynosure of all eyes amongst a certain coterie in London.

I was a good deal astonished when first I saw her. I was ushered into the now splendid house by no tiresomely magnificent footman, but by a simple, neat-handed Phyllis who showed me into a morning-room filled with books and papers, neatly pigeon-holed and tied with blue ribbon, as if their owner had been a lawyer. I had been sent for to see a servant, but I soon found that Rachel Farley, who sat quietly dressed by the business-looking table, had many other questions to consult me about. She was possessed of all the comeliness with which she had been credited, but had rather a masculine air, which—joined to a quick-sightedness very different from ordinary fine-ladyisms, crotchets, or caprices—seemed to search me through and through, and disconcerted me not a little.

I was young enough then for it to be exceedingly important to me to keep on good terms with this rich and influential lady who had sent for me. If I had been an elder son, I might perhaps have had a snug practice in a larger town, with a brass plate handed down from father to son. But the post which I had but lately taken at Halstead was at that time by no means snug or a sinecure. Yet I had to make the best of it. My father had died suddenly when I was but a child, and I had no one to purchase me a nice little cosy thing such as I might have fancied.

The old red-brick house, which had been so beautifully furbished up, with the garden wonderfully laid out, and the stairs with velvet carpeting, had made my heart beat a little faster with a sense of pleasant anticipation. If only Miss Farley had been a wee bit older, so as to wear a benevolent smile as she consulted me about her affairs! If I could have hoped that she would be favourably impressed by me, and lend me a helping hand up the first rungs of that ladder on which my feet were planted! New-comers were quite an acquisition at Halstead, and I confess I felt the tiny hamlet rather lonely. There was so little going on in it. The very fact of Miss Farley's coming had made me cheerful of heart, and I had been reading with more content than usual a letter from my mother, in which she had reminded me that I must take the rough with the smooth, and that rolling stones were apt to get barebacked.

I do not know why my heart should have sunk when I listened to the lady's conversation, nor why that talk should have seemed so preposterously out of keeping with her youth.

I ought not to have been weary of professional subjects. I could talk enough to my brethren about all sorts of sanitary matters, malaria and typhoid fever, and the need for elaborate precautions to enfranchise the lower classes from the slavery of disease and dirt which just then we were beginning to deplore. But, somehow, after we had done with the servant, who proved to have very little the matter with her, I should have liked to have turned the conversation with Miss Farley from channels so purely professional. Much as I cared for my profession, I longed to change our discussion to other topics more interesting to the laity.

I think she guessed my thoughts. For presently she said, with a smile :

"Women have hitherto escaped many difficulties by having others to manage for them. You see I prefer to see after everything for myself."

I answered something about its being an advantage sometimes to have the negative side of life allotted to one.

"An advantage to escape responsibility—an advantage not to have to commit oneself. Ah, I understand!" she said, with another smile, "it is so easy to take the burdens off one half of the creation by settling every question for us, and expecting us to wrap ourselves in garments of—what do you call it?—silliness? mystery? reticence? What is the word you think pretty for it?"

I did not like her banter, but I respected her earnestness when she went on to explain that she could not bear the fatigue and routine of a gay life, the constant change of costume—it was not her world, not her way; she was glad she had broken through fashionable life once and for all. For, as she declared, she used to say to herself, "If that sort of thing is to continue for years and years, how could I bear it?" and then her brain "grew dizzy in thinking of it." People, she explained, had called her rich, but she considered that money was neither good nor bad, merely the symbol of exchange, oftener abused than properly used. She had a perfect horror of "charity," but if I could call in sometimes when I passed and tell her how her money could be well used in promoting useful schemes for the public good, I might always count on her assistance.

I had, certainly, no occasion to complain of an indifferent reception, and yet I had to screw myself up to the point of answering her. When she further went on to complain of the state of Halstead and its neighbourhood, the ignorance of the poorer people, their ruinous extravagance in things which science had taught us to utilise, and when she wandered off

into still more learned talk I was more bewildered than ever, and not at all sure that I was equal to the grand career which she had planned for us doctors. It was difficult not to be tickled by the humour of the thing, especially when I slily took courage to draw her out, and found that she expected us to be making the grandest discoveries, while we were dimming our eyes with microscopes, and fidgeting with test tubes.

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II.

"SUCH a woman, so handsome, so clever, so influential; and yet how would *she* like it if she were overworked already, called up at nights, bothered by day, having to ride at all hours through wind and rain, and still supposed to have superfluous energy for running other people's benevolent errands? Rather an unpleasant time I shall have of it if I do what I have promised her!"

And yet, though just at first I revolted from the idea, somehow I left no stone unturned to keep in her good graces. If she had shown any weakness which I could have seen through and despised, I might have been disgusted! But, after a time, her earnestness communicated itself to me. It was a pleasant house to go to. And though I thought it right to refuse the offer which she made to me of constant emolument, yet I found myself inconsistently making the most of the leave granted me to bring her word of any real cases of distress or improvidence at Halstead. And though she qualified her standing invitation by a statement, "I hope you are a man not difficult to entertain, for I am a busy woman myself, and may not have time to attend to you," I hastened to assure her that I required no entertaining whatever.

I am afraid I had never before been so active in spotting abuses. We had not half the "new lights" then which you have at present, and even Miss Farley had not learnt to trace her origin to puff-balls or jelly-fish, or to boast, as some of our ladies do now, about her cousins the gorillas and orang-outangs.* But she perceived that cleanliness and thrift were

* EDITOR.—The doctor was old-fashioned, and this banter marks a stage of opinion which has passed. It ignores the poetic side of the question, which is probably the truer one:

"For of one stuff has some Hand made us all,
Baptised us all in one great sequent plan,
Where deep to ever vaster deep may call,
And all their large expression find in man."

next to godliness, and that to allow the ignorant people to go on with heaps of decaying vegetables and cesspools near their houses was as bad as letting them put loaded pistols to their heads. At one time I had news to tell her of good food thrown away in the dust-holes because the wives did not know how to cook it, and at another of children ill-clothed as well as ill-fed, or cottages, neglected by the landlords, which needed repairing. She was never so happy as when she had a grievance to redress, a wrong to set right, or a scandal to agitate about. And by degrees I began to find that my time was terribly encroached upon by the need of supplying her with material for her energies.

"Nonsense, it is not the number of your patients; you need not hurry back when we have so much to see about," she would say, in her pretty imperative manner, at which it was difficult to take offence, especially as she had offered—and I had refused—fees for this sort of "free-lance" work.

I could not afford to be affronted. For, though her estimate did not sound very flattering to my practice, it was at that time pretty true. I had to work my way upwards, dispensing as much as possible with those luxuries called "necessities," which did not exist in a primitive state of society.

All such social accidents, as Miss Farley reminded me, were transitory and fleeting; but I thought if she had to put up with them herself she would find that they were by no means contemptible. She herself, in her desire to help humanity, to avenge the wrongs of her sex, and to prevent the mean and despicable from usurping the place which rightly belonged to the rational and noble, could judge little of these minor indignities, as she had never been subjected to them. It stood to reason that she could have but a speculative interest in all that was foreign to her own experience.

I thought she was covertly laughing at me when she advised me one day to give a dinner-party once a year to all the farmers and their wives who had paid their doctor's accounts, and *not* to include those who were still my debtors.

"How is that possible," I answered, rather testily, "when I have no wife to entertain them?"

I immediately regretted the simplicity of my answer, hoping that I did not blush like a raw schoolboy, when I met my new friend's eyes fixed quizzingly on me, and looking even clearer than their wont. I got up and gazed out of the window. I certainly did not glance in the corner of the room where the little "companion" who had to mend the rents which Miss Farley so constantly made in her laces, and to listen to all the

cook's demands, sat quiet as a mouse, apparently not noticing either of us.

I had never liked to introduce myself to Miss Blanchard by addressing my conversation to her in the presence of her patroness. She had a timid, nervous manner which made me fearful of addressing her, and sometimes it struck me that Miss Farley, with all her kindness, had not avoided the mistake of patronising her too much. Jane Blanchard was little, and rather pale, with a clear transparent pallor very different from that which our great poet abuses as the "white flag of Death." I saw at a glance that she was strong and healthful, for all the white-rose paleness of her cheek. And her fairness was relieved by the redness of her lips and the blueness of her eyes. Very busy she always was, and, taking it all together, very uncommun cative, though her naïve speeches, with childlike wisdom in them, had sometimes startled me, marking undeniably a new stage in my feelings towards women.

Was she as simple as she seemed to be? I doubted it. Miss Farley did not convince me, though she was inclined to deplore that one of the most fatal impediments to her companion's mental progress was Jane's own painful determination to think too meanly of her own abilities.

I was almost mad with the richer lady when she said one day, as if deprecating the low opinion which I should probably form of Miss Blanchard:

"One might think hers was a case of mental inferiority, which indeed it is not." And then she went on further to explain, "She was a bright girl when I first knew her, though a very quiet one. Now if, as they say, the 'boy' is father to the man, why shouldn't the girl be mother to the woman? Why shouldn't the girl's character help us to interpret what is puzzling in the grown-up stage?"

I declared I thought it ought to be quite the rule, and was perfectly ready to admit that the "boy" was a fearful animal with all sorts of brute instincts untamed, a predisposition to tyranny inherited from whole generations of prigs, whilst the "girl" was charming.

"Well, then, Miss Blanchard *is* all right, though she sits so still, and talks so often with that demi-semiquaver in her voice, which makes me half angry. She was a very clever child, though she is still as innocent as a baby, and one longs to preserve that charming unconsciousness of hers intact."

My private opinion was that Miss Farley owed more than she knew to her little companion, on whose young shoulders more burdens were imposed than I thought to be good for her.

Rachel Farley was five-and-twenty, and Jane Blanchard seven years younger. But the heiress liked laxity rather than rigidity in her own household arrangements; and, had it not been for Jane's investigations, no one knows what might have gone on in that *régime* of black-beetles which Miss Farley had too lightly relegated to the superintendence of that solemn old housekeeper, who was considered to be necessary as a sheep-dog for both girls in those old-fashioned days! Curious servants we had at Halstead. The housemaids believed devoutly in "kismet," went to astrologers who ventured prophecies about their love affairs by aid of the stars, and were certain that the postman was going to bring them letters because they had seen some tea-leaves floating in the tea-cups. The cooks would neglect to skim the soup, and then say they did not know why it should turn out badly, "no, not if they was to be knocked down for it," because they had dreamt on the preceding night that it was "certain sure" to be good. It was vexing to see how the younger maids took advantage of Miss Farley's kindness, lounging about behind her back, and displaying alacrity in her presence. But Jane Blanchard's pair of innocent-looking eyes were always, as I happened to notice, on the alert, "ferreting out everything," as the servants complained. And as to her "mental inferiority," why, had I not also noticed the smile which at rare intervals lit up her face as with a flash of absolute colour, with a sort of spontaneously illuminating light?

I fear I was a bit of a humbug, as I answered the clever lady:

"You can be very enthusiastic about your female friend."

"Why shouldn't I be?" she retorted. "On the whole, I prefer women to men; and friendship seems to me nobler and less selfish than what people call falling in love."

Why should her simple words have jarred on me? Why should I have wished her to meet her Nemesis?

"She doesn't mean her jests to sting as they do; but it's habit—and just as if she couldn't help making them," I said to myself, as I hurried to my lonely lodgings that night, more conscious than usual of the bitterness of the wind, and the ruffled, leaden colour of the sea. There was a solitary boat out, and a gray heron was standing like a ghost on the sand. I wondered how *he* would like it, if he lived all alone in lodgings, and then told myself that I was quite sure that poor little Jane Blanchard did not get sympathy and petting enough. I had never seen Miss Farley make much of her, and I had heard her boast that all sensible women scorned kissing.

"A girl who doesn't trouble herself about any 'cause' in particular, who doesn't think it her special mission to set

the world to rights, and who isn't always bothering herself about the husks of statistics, may be sensible and practical enough for all that."

And then I do not know exactly how it happened, but once or twice, when Miss Farley was out, and when I called to ask for some money to be applied to a good purpose, I had to leave my message with little Miss Blanchard. We were thinking just then of a sort of village hospital, and a school of some kind for the neglected children of the poorer sort; and, when Jane began to talk, I found that her remarks were apposite, and that she took considerable interest in all our schemes.

She did not exactly take me by storm. I do not think I should have liked her any better if she had. I did not want a "whirlwind in petticoats," only a dear, intelligent home-companion for a wife. I am afraid I had been blind to local charms —perhaps because they had been too ready to attract my attention. But Jane Blanchard was no butterfly thing, in spite of that pretty hair of hers, the lightness of which prevented her from looking like a little brown wren even when she was quietly dressed. I found that, when she once began to talk, she could be grave and gay, alternately wise and foolish, with a foolishness which had something sedate about it. She seemed to me just the wife for a hard-working, sometimes jaded doctor, unobtrusive, unselfish, practical, and quietly cheerful; bright-eyed, bright-haired, and yet tried—orphan as she was—in the sharpest school of adversity, and able to meet difficult crises thoughtfully.

Well, Miss Farley had stolen a march upon the people of Halstead, and, before they had time to decide that it was hardly proper for two young women to live together with nobody but a housekeeper to take care of them, she had carried the day, and was left mistress of the field. People tried to set aside their prejudices when they found, as I did, that it was pleasant to visit her. Till she came, the old red-brick house had been ugly and hopeless-looking, but now there was a sort of double life going on in it of work and enjoyment. The thousand and one refining influences which lift us up into the life of civilised beings, the true sympathy of heart and intellect with the beauty which attracted the eye, were all to be found at the Grange.

By degrees both men and women were constantly entertained at the house. And though Miss Farley still spoke scornfully of men-servants as being so much in the way, having a tendency to knock things over, and being clumsier than maids, still the edict seemed by degrees to be withdrawn which prohibited guests of the obnoxious sex from being invited to her table.

"It is such tame work for every one; there is so little which is really exciting going on, unless there are just a few picnics and things of that sort, you know. Doctor, it is *your* fault, you put it into my head first that it is more healthy to have a little recreation," she said apologetically, the first time I expressed my surprise.

What could I answer but in effect what every one said to her?

"Why should you shut yourself up—you who are still so young, and have a duty to perform to other people?"

She still inveighed against the two classes from whom she had fled in London—the aristocrats who she declared were somewhat dull, and the millionaires, who could purchase everything but good company. Here in Halstead she declared it was quite a different thing; the tables never groaned under useless luxuries; you were never told in a stage whisper about your neighbour who possessed "thousands," or worried by women's diamonds. Miss Farley herself seldom wore an ornament, and never a ring; she would have looked upon it as a symbol of bondage.

Did any one really know her innermost nature? I confess that she baffled many who, when she first came to live among us, had been speechless and overcome by those high notions of hers, but who found after a time that she was becoming more like the rest of us. There were fewer of her little sarcastic laughs, with the corners of her mouth turned down, at the absurdities of human nature. Among the men whom I now and then met in her company was one in whom I had no profound belief. Shallow people, as she told me, misjudged him, but she evidently had a high opinion of his merits.

She had perhaps been somewhat touched by the evident devotion with which Mr. Roper had followed her from town. What else should have induced him to come to live for some months at such a dead-alive place as Blackquay? He was undeniably handsome. His face was perhaps a trifle too regular in its chiselled correctness, but grave and almost severe in its expression. His figure was tall, his smile prepossessing but uncommon. Nor was his intellect less remarkable than that of Miss Farley; he was unpretentious, but certainly her equal in talent. He was not rich, but this made her the more certain of securing his homage. How could she know that his pride revolted from the idea of owing anything to his wife, and that the fact of her being an heiress was sufficient to keep him from even thinking of her?

I cannot, when I look back upon it, find it in my heart to

reflect upon Miss Farley for the sudden melting just at this crisis which comes to most women once in their lives. Had I not myself blamed her for the more severe of her theories? Did I not think her more pleasant and attractive than usual when she said to me one day:

"I find I make such sad mistakes. I rush into things too quickly, and let my enthusiasm carry me away, and then I make—enemies."

"Oh! no, I should not think that possible; you ought not to have any enemies," I answered.

"Ought I to take that as a compliment? After all, I *like* people—I like to be popular."

Had she already begun to guess that her reputation for superior wit as well as her money had placed a barrier between herself and Edward Roper? She ought to have guessed it. One night, when she took the extreme step of gracing a ball at Blackquay with her radiant presence, and when Jane sat unnoticed, declining to dance, Mr. Roper chose the plainest woman in the room, and surprised people by giving her dance after dance. But Rachel Farley only attributed this to his inherent modesty, his dread of preferring an overbold request. Time passed, and still he lingered at Blackquay, though apparently he had no need of our sea breezes. And she, who had been so praised and courted, could she imagine that she had anything more to do but to descend from her high pedestal, and extend her glove in pity to her faithful admirer, never doubting but that he was ready to kneel at her feet?

She had been waiting for the finale—she who was beginning suddenly to say to herself, "Can greatness or cleverness content a woman without domestic happiness as life advances?" The world, she remembered, had often tired her; other men and women had fatigued her. Even schemes of usefulness had seemed to be difficult to carry on single-handed, and calumny had not always spared her, for she had made, as she said, "mistakes." For the first time in her life, she was seized with a sort of apprehension. Was it possible that at the bottom of her heart she could be, after all, a coquette? If this man had such a hopeless attachment for her, as to make him bury himself in this place because she was there, could she trifle with him, and keep him hanging on for ever?

We outsiders knew nothing of this mode of reasoning, but we saw the change in Miss Farley's softened face. I am afraid the gossips amused themselves a little one night, when this barrister from London—what could have become of his

briefs?—trod by accident on the velvet drapery which she wore, like

> Troy's proud dames whose garments sweep the ground,

and then, apologising, sat down deferentially by her side, talking longer than usual, and seemingly absorbed in his talk. It certainly spoilt things a little that he made a sudden start at the sound of a piano, which struck up just then in an adjacent room, and soon after got up to listen to it. But no one noticed the quiet little lady who happened to be playing, or even inquired her name.

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III.

THE next morning, Edward Roper presented himself at the Grange, and asked for Rachel Farley, who received him alone. There was a strange softness in her voice, a beautiful relenting in her face, though to a dispassionate observer there was nothing so very pretentious in the idea that he might marry her. Yet this woman had refused so many of his sex, that it was much for her to resign her most highly cherished theories. For the vanquisher to be vanquished had never occurred to her in her wildest dreams as possible. He was conscious of a slight palpitation of the heart, when he secretly hoped she would not scorn him in her cool stateliness. While she—the ice once broken between them—listened, hesitating, or, as she imagined, undecided, to the burning words which fell on her ears.

"All this—this is so new to me!" she said vaguely, to gain time.

Even then she did not know that they were at cross-purposes. The thoughts which were fluttering and elating the one were making the other faint with the possibility of misapprehension. The blood seemed to ebb back to her heart as she added:

"I—I am trying to understand, but I do not think I quite follow you."

Again he tried to formulate his ideas, so that her mind could take them in, with that thrilling intonation in his voice which made a new light break suddenly in on her. He was saying that he wanted a useful companion for his life, one whom he much preferred to girls who were "merely pretty."

She did not know what he meant, but her self-control was perfect, and she answered that she was fain to admit how her own reflections had led her to the same conclusion—girls who were merely pretty were somewhat wearying.

His heart beat faster as he looked at her, and thanked her for the care she had taken of his "Jane," while he urged her with all his eloquence to promote his suit.

There are no such skilful actors as women, none with such tactics in hiding their secrets. Dying Cæsar did not draw his robe around him more carefully than Rachel Farley hid her wound. Her hand-shake and her parting smile were more conventional than usual; no stickler for propriety could have found fault with either. And if, when he left her, she lost her cool stateliness, and let the mouth which could be so pleasant fall into hard, cynical curves; if she hated herself for the fact that she had descended so low, and spurned herself for her fatal error—well, it was only to be expected.

But Miss Farley was also passionate. And just then she heard a footstep. The muscles of her face contracted irrepressibly, and there was a feeling of choking anger in her throat as Jane Blanchard, with her usual quiet step, entered the room, as if nothing were the matter.

The girl paused as she stood just beyond the threshold. There was an anomaly in her friend's face which arrested her. There was no time for her to put herself on the defensive. If the citadel of her heart had contained any secret desirable to hide, it must have been stormed, and the poor little walls with which she had tried to defend it would inevitably have been blown down as by the blast of a trumpet.

"Mr. Roper has been here asking to see *me*, but it would have been a good deal more straightforward if he had asked to see *you*. He forgets that I am not your mother, and only a few years older than yourself. It seems to me a little hard that, because your mother is dead, *I* should be made a sort of cat's-paw to pull your chestnuts out of the fire."

Jane Blanchard stood riveted to the spot with surprise. Hypocrisy, as Miss Farley had said to herself, would be impossible under the circumstances, as the suddenness of her attack would be so unexpected.

She prided herself on being a skilful detective who, wishing to get at the truth of the matter, cross-examines his witness, without leaving her time for any preparation.

"Mr. Roper has often sought you when I have been absent?"

"Yes," was the simple answer, as the girl stood looking at her in her amazement.

"He has talked to you a good deal?"

"At one time or another."

"And you guessed that he was beginning to care for you?"

"Well—perhaps—I could not help it."

"And you thought it better to keep it to yourself? Why give me such short answers?"

"Because you question me—like that. I had nothing before to tell you," was the nervous response.

Miss Farley's anger was becoming galling not only to herself, but to the other who depended on her. Her lips even were pallid. And when the girl, who stood trembling before her, continued hesitatingly: "Nothing. I—I do not want attentions of that sort—they are most distasteful to me. I could frankly tell you——" she burst out indignantly:

"Tell me nothing more—keep to monosyllables—I have been deceived by you. I might have known it. You were so quiet in my presence that the atmosphere has become oppressive—and now I do not feel as if I can *breathe* in the same room with you!"

The girl stood looking at her with eyes dilated. The fault of timidity on her part—which had always been an impediment to freedom of intercourse between the two women—prevented her from finding any words to defend herself against the illogical character of the attack. Anger is always inconsistent. And in this case wounded feeling and ill-regulated impulses seemed to have roused a brief delirium impossible to control. A quiver of pain passed over Jane's face—almost a throe of grief which shook her whole frame, and then—for there seemed nothing else to do—she obeyed the imperious order and left the room.

The weather was oppressively hot that day. And one of those storms, which are occasionally terrific in our neighbourhood, seemed to be brewing. The tranquillity which is often the precursor of a tempest was ominous to those who knew how to anticipate the change.

I remember the sort of quivering heat as if the sky was of burning brass, and then the gradual veiling of the sun, and the little gray clouds slowly spreading from the horizon. I recollect inquiring with some anxiety if the daily coach had started for Blackquay and Mineweir, and blaming the driver for his imprudence. For a short time afterwards there was a noise of rushing water, and the winds were tearing at the stunted furze-bushes and the fir-trees on the hills as if—to use a hackneyed simile—they had all been suddenly loosed from the bag of Æolus, and were tearing and struggling with each other. A sapling was torn up by the roots, which was close to my own

lodgings, and in the mile which separated myself and my modest belongings from the Grange, which was now so familiar to me, branches of trees were strewn about, the devastation threatening to be not only pitiful but dangerous.

I had no fear for myself; I was too used to these sort of things, and I remembered the unprotected position of the women at the old red house. For the building stood exposed to the fury of the winds, and, with Miss Farley's prejudice against employing men-servants, it was possible they might need some sort of help. My horse was a tolerably fleet one, and, though he did not much like it, he and I were not long in covering the distance. I tied him up in the disused stable; for it was one of Miss Farley's numerous fads to hire whenever she wanted a carriage, declaring that she did not want to be bothered with one of her own, and that she preferred, as a rule, to trust to her own legs. She met me herself, with her usual promptitude, in the large hall to which she had gathered all her servants, after giving orders that shutters should be put to all the windows. And though she spoke a little abruptly, declaring that "there was noise enough to give her an ear-ache," the terrified state of her female servants was enough to account for her abruptness.

The storm was raging now in all its violence. A terrible flash of lightning every now and then illuminated the hall, the thunder crashing on the roof of the house, while the rushing of a neighbouring stream made the noises more ominous. Suddenly there was a cry that a fire-ball had fallen, and at the same moment the housekeeper was said to be in hysterics, throwing herself on her knees and imploring the assistance of heaven. A couple of maids went to her, trying to hold her as she proceeded to further lengths of excitement, declaring that the end of the world had come. She was a "powerful old body," as one of the housemaids afterwards declared, stout as well as strong. And when, finding that her arms were pinioned, she began kicking with heavy boots, so as to send the girls spinning like a couple of ninepins, our attention was so occupied with her that we thought of little else.

"It is the best thing in the world," I said; "it has created a little diversion. If I had anything to prescribe at all, I should have prescribed a little laughter," I continued, looking for sympathy to Miss Farley.

But the smile died on my lips when I looked at the faces in the hall, and suddenly missed Jane Blanchard's. It was so usual for her to be unobtrusively helpful, keeping out of the way, not to make herself prominent, that till now I had taken it

as a matter of course that she was there, ready for emergencies, prompt and skilful.

At the same moment Miss Farley afterwards told me she remembered her.

"Where is Miss Blanchard?" I asked, a little suddenly.

"Oh! hiding herself in the bedroom," was the somewhat unready answer.

But when one of the maids was prompt to deny this, as she had put up the shutters in Miss Blanchard's bedroom, and seen no sign of her, there was an ominous silence. A search was commenced at once. There was no trace of her in the house.

"Is it possible she can have gone *out?*" I asked, somewhat sternly; for I saw that Rachel Farley was pale and alarmed, like myself

Again the thunder crashed over the roof like the roar of artillery, and again the housekeeper screamed that the house would be struck.

"The house is safe enough," I said, repeating my question. "Is it possible Miss Blanchard can have been allowed to expose herself to the violence of a storm like this?"

"England is a free country—she is mistress of her own movements," answered Miss Farley, a little coldly.

In reality, her heart was beating as if ready to suffocate her. For she valued the little friend who had so unexpectedly obeyed her wish that she should leave the room, and had, more unexpectedly, interpreted it into a desire to leave the house. Nobody could, hitherto, have been kinder to Jane Blanchard, and she loved her with all the intensity of her nature. She was a woman who had too much character to be enervated by prosperity, but for the first time she was aware of how the gifts which Fortune had heaped on her had sapped some of the good in her, not blinding or hardening her, but making her too imperious.

I was struck by the dull, impassionate manner in which she answered my question. It was so unlike her, that I was convinced there must be some explanation. How could she tell me that she was half inclined to apologise for her unjustifiable violence, and was already suffering agonies in the awakening of a remorse which had followed her brief delirium? No amount of sacrifices would now have seemed to the warm-hearted woman too great to mitigate the irreparable wrong which she began to think she had committed.

And yet I thought her cruel. I said, with gathering indignation:

"Why did she go out by herself? You might have known

a storm was coming. Why did nobody miss her? It is culpable negligence!"

I still received no answer. The other women were selfishly occupied with their own anxieties. But Miss Farley stood facing me as if she had been turned into stone. There was anguish in her gaze, as I continued, somewhat wildly:

"It is not an afternoon for a dog to be out of doors."

Her voice sounded strangled in her throat, as she asked me:

"Do you think the coach has started?"

"Yes—I believe the coachman was fool enough to start more than an hour ago. But it cannot possibly go on. It cannot get over the moors. Do you mean to say you think it possible she has gone by the coach?" I asked, a little savagely, not meaning to hurt her feelings.

And then, what could have happened to our strong-minded lady, whom I had always credited with perfect health? She turned from white to red, and seemed to totter, reeling as if she would fall. I ran to her with extended arms. But in a moment she had righted herself. Her nerves were of steel; her energy was indomitable.

"It was not *my fault*," she said, speaking to herself rather than to me. And then, seeing that I was dragging on my mackintosh, tearing it in my haste, she said, in a deprecating tone:

"Dr.—Meredith—you can't be in earnest? Why should more lives be risked—you—you can't do any good—it is terrible enough already."

I did not listen to her words, as I seized my knobbed stick, and struggled as well as I could into my coat. I might have saved myself the trouble. For, as soon as I left the door, the wind tore it into strips, driving it against my face, and cutting the skin with merciless lashes. By-the-bye, I recollect that Miss Farley's servants thought me beside myself, and did all they could to prevent my leaving the house. One or two of them even placed themselves as a barrier against the door, trying to prevent me from leaving. But I did not attempt to utter a word. Something stuck in my throat, as I pushed past them with scant ceremony.

After all, was I not accustomed to brave all dangers, exposing myself to the virulence of infectious diseases, as well as to the violence of the elements? I was young, I was active; I did not fear the storm, knowing that the number of those struck by lightning is comparatively small. I had to spur on my horse. For the marshy ground was so saturated that there was considerable danger of getting stuck in it. So I chose by

preference the stones and boulders, scrambling over them as best I could, at the risk of breaking my animal's knees, or scratching him as well as myself by the furze-bushes and stunted blackthorns. A tree fell with a crash but a few yards away from me, and once a ball of fire, as they called it, fell a little distance off. At another time I should have been considerably interested in investigating an interesting scientific phenomenon. But now I had but one thought—how to find traces of the coach?

Well, I never *did* find the traces. For the coach was standing still, in an unaccustomed part of the road, the terrified driver telling its few occupants that their only chance was to walk. The frightened passengers had one by one dismounted, saturated to their very skins, and believing, as he told them, that they were much more likely to be struck packed together in a living mass than they would be singly. Besides, as he said, he had no choice; the horses had refused to go on. It was only afterwards, by a great amount of coaxing and beating, that he got them by slow degrees to Blackquay, taking but one passenger with him, and that an invalid lady. The others had by twos and threes found their way in a dripping condition to their homes. There was but one among them all who thought she had no home to go to.

The sighing of a chilly gust from the sea, with a sobbing cry as if from a broken heart, mingled with the continual sound of the rain and the rumbling of the thunder, which had now become distant, and seemed to confuse and irritate my brain. I could hardly see, hardly hear. It seemed as if I had known it all before, when at last I came upon a little figure which still looked dainty, in spite of its draggled skirts, and which was struggling on in the direction of Blackquay.

"Where am I?" she said, as I came up to her, and gently pronounced her name—it was her Christian name; so stupid of me to forget in the excitement of the moment—and placed my hand on her arm. "Where am I? What do you want of me? Oh! you are Dr. Meredith. They have sent you, but indeed I can't go back. What is that noise I hear? Ah! I recollect." And then, with her big blue eyes looking confidently in my face, and the painful blush of maidenhood disconcerted, if not shamed, she cried, with sudden energy, "Go back—go back!"

It was my own fault for trying to reason with her. For she was in no state for reasoning with; the fevered, tired brain was wearing itself out with endless conjectures—as to who had sent me? what they meant by it? why Mr. Roper had dared to speak to Miss Farley? and protestations that she had given him no

encouragement; she was left so much alone, and various statements of this sort, till at last she broke down altogether. Seeming suddenly to recognise the full import of what she was talking about, and how she was betraying herself, she made an unexpected appeal. It was a cry of distress. "Oh! help me; I have no one! Give me some advice; tell me what to do."

"It was all a misunderstanding," she said, still refusing to return with me, though I drew her arm within mine, and did my best to induce her. "Cannot you get her to see through it, and not suspect me of insincerity? I—I have never had a brother."

It was only by persuading her to let me be more than a brother to her, as soon as I should have enough to support a wife, that I could have any influence over her at all, and get her to confide in me a little of her trouble.

How I persuaded her to go back with me and get her things properly dried, if she did not mean to kill herself, I scarcely know now. One thing was pretty certain—that the inspiration which had swept through me in this strange conjunction of events was the most fortunate thing that could possibly have happened for me. I felt a little guilty of taking advantage of her forlorn condition, as she let me help her home, talking—exhausted as she was—in high praise of Miss Farley. She never would let me say a word against that lady from that day to this. And indeed, as soon as I really knew Jenny, it was for me to discover that the devices of forensic talent were by no means unknown to this little woman, who was already framing her speeches and putting things in a different light, lest I should have a word to say against her benefactor. What a mistake it is not to make women lawyers! At least Jane (or, as you know I always called her, Jenny) seemed born to be a special pleader; I never knew her equal.

"Ah! you don't understand her—she never knew a mother, and all the world has been at her feet. Her father indulged her so. And what a goose that Mr. Roper must have been never to speak to me, but to go to *her* as if she were so much older than myself, and only seven years between us! Do I look so much younger than I am?" were amongst the words which she gasped out, as she clung to the arm which I had passed round her, half helping, half lifting her, fearing all the time that she would catch her death of cold, as she persisted in enlarging on the good qualities of Miss Farley.

Did she look younger than she was? Why, she looked a perfect child, with those wet draggled skirts, which she was obliged to hold up over her little soaked boots. And it was she who took the initiative, trying to make things smooth, and to

relieve the elder woman from the mortifying sense of a false position, directly we reached the Grange.

"I did not mean to wound you. If I have hurt you, forgive me. You will *know* now that I never cared a farthing about *that man*," she said, with a little confiding glance at me, telling me that it was *I* who had given her courage by putting things straight.

"I know I said unjust words, I know that I was cruel, but I know also that she will forgive until seventy times seven—that is the provoking part of it. It is *she* who has the best of it," said Miss Farley to me, a few days afterwards, in what Jenny called the "opulence of her noble heart."

She never spoke again of Mr. Roper, who soon left the neighbourhood, and she ever afterwards kept firmly to her resolution of not marrying.

For just a little while she pained us by making us feel that she blamed herself for forfeiting what had hitherto been her just title to importance and self-respect. But when after a time she made our hearts swell gratefully by a generosity which enabled us to hasten our marriage, and when she told us that our children should never want, you may be sure that mortifications were altogether forgotten. Her pride fortunately helped her altogether to conceal hers. And when after a time she came forward as the advocate for various societies intended to ameliorate the position of her sex, she had no time for mortification or sense of failure.

So far as I know, she never suffered from the sense of loneliness. Even at the age of threescore I have seen her on a platform surrounded by younger women who liked and admired her, and I am sure she never fretted in the prosy afternoon of life.

As to Jenny, she always avoided the story of our engagement, and you may be sure I never touched on a painful subject likely to dim the brightness of her eyes.

"You know, sir, I never wanted a doctor—not even when I was soaked to the skin," was all the allusion she ever made to it, checking me instantly if I ever dared to mention the names of Miss Farley or Mr. Roper, except in so far that she would always declare I was one of the cleverest of men in clearing up a misapprehension, even when it pressed upon people unbearably.

Ah, Jenny, my darling, how you over-valued me! never doubting my ability, and even supposing that I could untie the knots and smooth the strands of other people's lives! Was ever a married life so happy as our own?

# MISSING

## I.

WHEN old Mr. Arnott of Valeside died, some twenty years ago, there was great grief in the neighbourhood of Halstead. He had been eminently genial and hospitable, and one came away from his house feeling the better for having visited there, with a spur to fresh activity and a glow of generous emulation. Not that Edgar Arnott was ambitious, though he was unaffectedly intellectual. He hankered after few of the honours which earth could give him. The originality of his conversational powers was the natural outcome of a reflective mind ; while the refined tastes of his wife, and the well-oiled machinery of her domestic arrangements, combined with her pleasant culture and rare intelligence, rendered her the fitting complement of her husband. Indeed, there were some people who rated Mrs. Arnott's excellences even higher than those of her husband, and looking back it seems to me that her combination of gracious womanliness and housewifely dignity is a type of character rather to be regretted, inasmuch as you do not often meet with it in these days.

The one drawback about the Arnotts was that they had an only child, born to them somewhat late in life. He was a child of no uncommon parts, but their anxious wishes were so centred upon him that other people were apt to be bored when they were consulted about him.

The Arnotts, like most thinking people, were somewhat in advance of their times. I do not wish to be cynical, when I say they had anticipated a virtue which the present generation has overdriven into a vice. If there is one topic more than another apt to weary outsiders it is when parents begin to en-

large on the education of their offspring. I always long to entreat for a little mercy on the young plants to allow time for the natural opening of the first cotyledon leaves. And, if clever children are to be shown off, I feel inclined to growl, in the Johnsonian fashion, "Let the little dears say it together, then it will be soonest over." I believe if there is one subject more than another on which the present generation has prated until it has stultified itself with an endless variety of theories all contradicting each other, it is that of education.

Jenny used to tell me that one good came out of it—that this was the first time since the days of Queen Elizabeth when the injustice done to her own sex in this matter was being remedied.

"Remedy it by all means," I used to say, "if you know where to stop. But if you saw all the hydrocephalous girls that I do, with some whose sallow paleness, as well as their broad, projecting brows and half-starved hair, tells a tale of what is going on, you would know when to pull up before you ruin the health of the future mothers of England."

About one thing we were agreed, and that was that Benjamin, as old Arnott had named his son in acknowledged admiration of scriptural nomenclature, was a troublesome sort of prig, all the more so that he had not inherited the cleverness of his parents.

"Goodness knows what he has inherited," I used to say, when I lost patience about it. "Perhaps his qualities have come down to him from some remote ancestor."

Good Mrs. Arnott, who had formed a passionate friendship with my wife, would lament the lack of premature intellect in her child. Her husband, who had been always a book-worm, had been able to put Latin and Greek into pretty fair English at twelve years of age. His had been one of those cases in which extraordinary devotion to study had not dwarfed the intellect in after years. But in vain was Benjamin dinned with grammar and vocabularies. Nothing could make him a prodigy, and I think that the parents had themselves to blame when the lad, to their grief and consternation, was caught cribbing at school, and received, at the horrified father's request, one of the worst floggings which his schoolmaster could inflict. There was something touching afterwards in the way in which, as the progress still lagged, Edgar Arnott would consult me as to his compunctions of conscience, and his fear lest he had been too severe with the boy. Arnott was always good at short anecdotes, which made him a capital host and a welcome diner-out. And it was amazing after this to hear the number of stories he got

together in a short time, to prove that talent developed late, and that precocity was to be avoided as the sure blighting of capacity.

Well, I was sick of being consulted as to how this precious child of his was to turn to best account the faculties heaven had given him, and how Benjamin was to be carefully guarded against the evils to which his inherited propensities might incline him. The unfortunate boy was seldom allowed to forget himself. And when I became aware that nothing could prolong Arnott's life, and that the habit of watchful speculation would still be kept up by the mother, I felt that the lad would hardly be worse off for having one parent the less to criticise him, and one less to grieve at the failure of expectations.

I was a busy man, and was rather taken by surprise when I found on the opening of the will that I was left one of the principal trustees, with provisions which were likely to hamper me, should Benjamin ultimately disappoint his relatives, or astonish his neighbours as I expected he would. The sugar-plum of a small legacy did not make things much better. For, though it was likely to be hardly earned, the small sum of money was grudged to me by the distant relatives, who flocked to the funeral in the crape hatbands which were then in fashion, as if to make death more shocking. They did not look particularly lively in their grimy habiliments of black, and, of all the abominations ever invented, I think crape is the worst. The expression of their faces was veritably that of mourning when they heard that all superfluous money had been left to various charities.

For the rest, Arnott had always acknowledged that for his son's sake he was very sorry he had made a fortune ; he thought the age was undermined by luxury, and that children did better educated in simplicity.

Poor Mrs. Arnott! Her husband had lived as if the future had been ever before him, and as if life need be no less cheerful although it was a preparation for the change which men think so awful. There was an expression in Edgar's face which the majority of people would never be likely to forget—a sort of spiritual illumination, if one may be allowed the expression, which increased as he neared the end. But the son could never have recognised the superiority of his father's character. Nothing, I felt convinced, but some terrible shock would ever open the lad's eyes to see anything beyond his precious self. And the mother, who had depended upon her home affections, found herself suddenly very much alone, although there were people who sedulously cultivated her acquaintance, and some

who believed her to be one of the best and purest of women. I began to have a fear that she would spoil her son. There was never likely to be perfect intelligence between herself and the boy, yet it was a moot point whether in the end she would or would not be able to carry out her husband's intention with regard to her Benjamin—or her Benoni, as, in her sorrow, she had rechristened her only child.

There was the sort of rebound which I had expected—the reassertion of the healthy animal nature, of the physical energies of the lad—which I considered to be one of the most hopeful things about him. The acknowledged superiority of his mother, the assiduity of her attention to her duties, and the subtleties of her womanly nature, were all more or less incomprehensible and irksome to him.

"Boys will be boys, and stand in need of the society of a horde of savages like themselves," I said, almost laughing, when one day I was consulted as trustee as to the enormities of Benjamin's conduct in breaking windows by firing with catapults, kissing the girls who went to a school in the neighbourhood, and finally informing his mother that he "had had about enough of her petticoat government."

"I think the common-sense plan will be to send him to a public school," I could not help saying, reminding Agnes Arnott that "I had boys of my own, who were passing through the ragamuffin stage of existence. Indeed, I should be unhappy about them if they were *not* ragamuffins," I added, greatly to the lady's surprise. "You see they must work off the steam somehow, and at school he will play football and other good old English games."

Mrs. Arnott winced again. Football, though not quite so savage as it is in the present day, was even then, in the opinion of most mothers, a game more fitted for New Zealanders or South-Sea Islanders than for English boys. She finally waived her scruples, and went so far as to beg me to break the news to Ben before I left the house, as she knew my time was precious, and dreaded how he would take it. She need not have been under any apprehension. I felt inclined to box the fellow's ears, when I found how readily he fell in with my own argument—that he could not be all his day by the maternal fireside.

"I can't be a molly-coddle," he blundered out. "She'd keep me like Billy tied to a stake."

Billy was the goat, who was not allowed to wander, and only able to browse on the grass near its feet. The servants were very kind to it, and Mrs. Arnott often petted it. After all, the boy's simile was not so very inapt. Yet there was something

hard in his making it, and something unnatural in the phlegm with which he seemed inclined to take the separation from a mother who, though she was no longer young, was still so fascinating. Time had been unable to alter the beauty and nobility of Mrs. Arnott's features, and I succumbed, like other people, to her unusual charms when I left her that day, honouring her for the perfect command which she retained over her own feelings, though she was shaken in every nerve at the idea of parting with Ben.

"Pah," I said to myself, when I ran down the steps of the house, "who would have thought it possible that the son of such excellent people should seem to show a nature without affection of any sort?"

I was rather glad to hear afterwards that the boy had burst out bellowing when the parting really took place. After all, he had begun to show the force of inherited instincts. I reversed my hasty judgment, and made up my mind at once that there was probably a lot of good about him, though it had hitherto been covered in.

Well, as the years passed over our heads, and the lad returned for the holidays, my prophecies were fulfilled. He *was* a surprise, but not in the way I had expected. He took everything into his own hands. One resolution on which he prided himself was a determination not to turn any decent British author into Greek iambics or Latin prose. He considered that an utterly inane thing to do—a manifest and terrible waste of time. The days in which his father lived had been days in which any such independent expression of opinion on the part of a boy had been cruelly birched out of him. But, as a good many elder boys were beginning to be of Benjamin's way of thinking, naturally there was no allusion to the rod. No, Ben led the life of a gentleman, and used to lounge about with his hands in his pockets, or carrying a dandified little stick when he returned for the holidays. Mrs. Arnott did not understand it. But as he was less rough in his ways, and as other matrons assured her that the object of a public school was not to study Latin and Greek but to make friends and acquire "tone," the partial mother said little and only looked bewildered.

What a lot of talk there was at Halstead as the fellow grew up, about the evident improvement in his manners, and the advantage of a good "tone!" At the real teas with substantial bread and butter, rich cake, and hot muffins, that then took the place of the shadowy invention which you call "afternoon" teas, the mothers who had sons soon to be sent to the public

schools, would discuss the varying attractions of the Eton tone, the Harrow tone, the Rugby tone, and the Winchester tone. It was decided that nothing could rob a boy of that something, undefinable, unappreciable in his manner and style which had so improved the rough material of a young rogue like "the Arnotts' Benjamin." The result of defective education was especially to be seen in not having the trousers cut in the right way, or in losing the distinctive feature of a well turned-out necktie.

"You may laugh if you like," as one lady said affrontedly to me; "but I assure you we are not exaggerating. A young man who is to cut a figure in society must not undervalue such things."

"What fools the majority of mothers are!" I said, somewhat ungallantly to myself. "To think that they should care more about the veneering than the turning out of good articles all of one piece, fit for the wear and tear of after life."

Though I did not wish to be a cynic, I could not help wondering if such short-sighted parents ever thought of the unseen by-paths where temptation might be lurking, while they were chattering about the cut of a tailor's suit. Benjamin was to go to Cambridge; he was getting too old for Eton.

"Was the staying-power of his nature powerful enough to resist the influences to which a man of his sort would be certain to be exposed?" I asked myself the question, but was unable to answer it.

Ben's character had become more complex than I had ever supposed possible. On the one hand ordinary and superficial, obeying his own impulses, with no sense of things unseen, he was on the other haunted, in certain phases, by the pangs of a conscience which is said to be one of the attributes of youth. Selfish on most occasions, he could be heroic on a few.

He went to Cambridge with an idea of having new worlds to conquer. But I am afraid they were not worlds of fresh knowledge or connected with any unselfish purpose. He could not have spoken of them to his mother. I might have guessed that things were going wrong, though after a time he aired his new acquirements, and talked of reading as he had never talked of it before. I might have guessed it from the melancholy egoism with which he began to speak of his own future prospects.

"No one will believe you have a spark of good in you, if you insist on running yourself down in this way," remonstrated his mother in my presence one day.

Mrs. Arnott had been younger than my old friend Edgar, but the years were at last beginning to tell on her. She

welcomed Benjamin when he returned for his long vacations with an emotion too grave and serious to be pleasant to her son, and with a depth of feeling which alarmed me when I knew how much he was to her. When the scapegrace appeared it was as if a star had risen on her horizon. If the father had lived he would have been always foreseeing danger: but the mother had such trust that one did not like to disenchant her.

I only remarked that, as Benjamin deplored his own idleness, I hoped he would not slavishly surrender himself to the "natural indolence of his character."

The words were not mine, but Benjamin's own, and at the risk of offending him I could not help adding that "when our amusements interfered with our work the former should be made to give way."

I do not think he liked it; indeed, I afterwards feared that the fact of my plain-speaking, and the objection to being lectured, had something to do with the excuse which he made, after the first few vacations, that it would be necessary for him to travel—to see Paris and Switzerland—and therefore he could not return to visit his mother.

She was too unselfish to complain. "A son, you see," she exclaimed elaborately to me, "is not the same as a lover. He leaves home as a matter of course."

And yet she became ill, for he wrote home very little. It is one of the evils of the introduction of the penny post that young men in the present day do not know how to write letters. Benjamin sent telegrams—a plan of communicating, when the telegraph was comparatively new, which proved, to say the least of it, expensive. Mrs. Arnott showed me one of these telegrams. It was on a subject of importance, and she could not make out what it meant.

"It sounds dry," I could not help observing, as I put it down on the table.

"Oh, that is only because it isn't clear—and you can't expect clearness in telegrams, it's too expensive," she said, in ready excuse.

"Why doesn't he write more fully?"

"He is so pressed for time—travelling rapidly, you know."

The argument dropped. Who could have had the heart to tell her that her son was just as he always had been, with that selfishness which had been from childhood the root principle of his nature, enfeebling everything else which might have been good in him, like a poison which was as subtle as it was deteriorating? His nature was as self-pleasing as hers was self-spending.

Of course when he came home she gave him his usual welcome, as full of tender affection as it was of unblaming cordiality. She told me that she considered it was quite necessary for the completion of a man's education that he should travel. And, when she grew alarmed at the light tone of mocking indifference which he brought back with him from some of his travels, she began to talk of the probability that everything would right itself directly Ben was married.

"I do not know how long I shall be spared to be with him, and I should like to see him well married before I am taken away," she said anxiously to me one day.

"Well married," in her sense, meant that the principal use of a wife would be to elevate and help him, and I did not like to hint at the difficulty of finding a noble-minded wife to undertake such a duty for a coxcomb like Benjamin. I had liked him better, I must acknowledge, in the "rough diamond" stage than now when he looked every inch a gentleman.

"And yet I should not wonder if he finds some good woman to take him in hand. It is astonishing to us men. But the moral infection which some of these fellows carry about with them does not sometimes seem to signify to the other sex —so long as they don't remove the mask," I fumed to myself.

I expected every day to hear that he was engaged to some well-brought-up, amiable girl, and was only surprised when I found that the portraits Mrs. Arnott now constantly drew on the canvas of the future of

> That not impossible she,
> Who shall command my heart and me,

did not seem to make the slightest impression on Ben. Mrs. Arnott was quick to see when she had made a false move, and to hasten to remedy it. Since any mention of a wife threw the young fellow into a bad temper, and since she did not mean that there should be war between herself and him, she discreetly let the matter drop.

And so the next few years passed on. Benjamin was at the bar, but he never had practised, and did not seem to have any desire to do so. He was very comfortable in his briefless state; and though it was my private conviction that if a friend ever gave him a case to conduct he would be certain never to give him a second, I kept that opinion to myself. He was as popular as ever, and people only thought the more of his careful mother for being righteously fearful of damaging her son's high standing and her own honourable reputation by seeking for patronage for him. Then the news was whispered about that

he had at last fallen in love, and was to be married in a few months to a pretty, attractive girl.

It was odd that after this he should seem suddenly to be depressed in spirits—wandering aimlessly about by himself, still not with a desire to do anything, but as if he could not sit still. For the first time he seemed to avoid the society of his fellow-creatures, and I met him sometimes on the high moorland, where he had been wandering from morning till night, and I knew that his limbs were wearied.

"He has only taken the love malady in its most desperate form," I said at first to myself.

But a second glance at his face, with the eyes gleaming strangely, suggested to me an idea that there was something more the matter.

Soon afterwards I was called in haste. He was said to be seriously ill. Now I cannot say I was much alarmed by the message, considering that the young owner of Valeside had hitherto enjoyed such perfect health that the only other occasion when I had ever been called to see him was when he had taken too much drink, and his mother had mistaken the symptoms. I remembered how on that occasion he had been ashamed of his headache, and had acknowledged his excess on the following morning. He was not all bad. However degenerate in some respects his character might be, I knew that there were more elements of good in it than I had at first expected.

I found him apparently in a high fever, and his poor mother sitting anxiously beside his bed. A light tread is a second nature in a profession in which we learn to consider the nerves of our patients. And I had some difficulty in attracting the attention of either the mother or son, as I came in quietly as usual; they were so engrossed with each other. He was trying to tell her something which she could not understand, but which caused him to address her in terms both imperious and supplicating. I saw then that she made a supreme effort to understand him.

"I promise," she said earnestly, as if to satisfy him.

"Thank you," he said, sinking back on the pillows of the bed.

Her tears redoubled when she saw me. It was almost impossible to convince her that she was unnecessarily alarmed. She pressed with her lips the beloved hand which she imagined would soon be cold. And when he closed his eyes—I think, to shut out the sight of myself—she fell on her knees and began kissing the lids which she feared would be sealed for ever.

The agitation was too great for her at her age, and I was compelled to use gentle force as I led her reverently out of the room, and insisted on her lying down while I attended to the patient.

"He says he has something on his mind, that he cannot die till he has made a clean breast of it, and that you—you—will help him to mend it," she said, between her sobs; "but oh, doctor, that is all the delirium; he would always run himself down. I really do not know now what is the promise he has exacted from me."

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II.

It was partly as Mrs. Arnott said; the patient was feverish and excitable. His temperature was alarmingly high. I found also that the state of his body was greatly due to feelings which, for once, were highly wrought, and to a galling sense of being arraigned at the bar of his own conscience—a conscience which was burdened with the recollections of a treachery he had committed.

His face was turned aside on the pillows as I sat down by him, after completing my examination, waiting for what he might have to say. I wondered a little whether it concerned the gambling of which I knew he had been guilty on the Continent, and the reverses he had experienced. He had never told his mother of these losses of money, any more than of the follies which he had adopted at college. At any rate, whatever the incubus weighing upon him just then might be, I knew it was so necessary he should be rid of it that I wished to encourage him in the attempt of confiding it to a man whom he thought severe like myself. At last he said suddenly, with the wildness of desperation:

"Doctor, would you say that if a fellow had given his word he should keep it, even at the risk of cutting his own throat and bringing misery on his mother?"

I hesitated.

"How can I advise you? As a rule, a man should keep his word. But, you see, I know nothing of the circumstances."

He then said, with a suddenness which so astonished me that at first I was not able readily to answer:

"Doctor, I suppose you would laugh at any one who attached importance to a dream? But if a man dreamt the same dream three times, and if each dream were just like the one that went

before, a—a kind of warning to the man who dreamt it—wouldn't you say there must be something in it?"

I shook my head. It was impossible for me to enlarge upon the psychology of dreams just when a patient was in a critical state. I might have had my own opinion that the phenomena concerning dreams were worthy of investigation; but, knowing that the consensus of the medical profession generally would be adverse to attaching any importance to these phantasmagoria of the brain, I again shook my head.

He seemed to be disappointed.

"Wouldn't you? Not if, when the first time you dreamt it, you said, 'it's all a pack of nonsense,' and the next time 'utter rot—only a dream;' and then, if the third time it was even more vivid, till you got to see it when you were waking. There, there—don't you see it now?"

"See what?"

"That tall man in the winding-sheet beckoning and beckoning. I saw him first in my dreams, and now he is there all the time, telling me to come with him. No, I am not coming yet; I am among the living still," he said, with a strong shudder. And I saw that it was necessary for him to be soothed.

"Tell me your dream, and let me see if I can help you."

"You will only laugh at me. I don't expect you to understand it. You are cool and collected," he said, with a sudden burst of agitation.

"If I am cool and collected I shall be able better to help you, and prevent you from being overcome by any creation of your own fancy," I answered quietly, keeping my hand on his wrist that I might master the agitation should it threaten to become serious, as he poured out the following story, in curious wandering sentences, which I have attempted to put into a sort of shape that they may convey something of the same meaning to my readers as they did to me.*

Soon after his engagement to Miss Thelwall, his sleep became disturbed, and then he dreamed, for the first time, the dream which seemed to be so little in keeping with his then happy and exultant mood that he thought it impossible his own imagination could have played him such an eccentric trick. He dreamed that he was sick, lying on the very bed on which he was lying now, and that his friends were watching him with their anxious looks fixed on his face. He wished they would

* I need scarcely say that I had written down this story in the doctor's words, and it was even published, before I saw the translation of a Danish book called "Letters from Hell." The doctor never saw this book, which has been recently translated.—EDITOR.

not look at him in that way, as all his own powers were occupied in one intense struggle which he could not help—a struggle as if thought and feeling were battling to retain their hold over the matter which he called his body, but were being slowly driven out, and detaching themselves little by little from every part of his frame. He felt as if his limbs no longer belonged to him; then other members were ceasing to be a part of himself, and at last there was a strange consciousness that his soul seemed to be concentrated in one single part of what had once been himself. For his brain was already giving way, and he was scarcely conscious that his heart was making one more tremendous effort at a deep-drawn breath. He heard the sobs and wailings of his friends. He heard them say, "It is over at last," and he had an agonising desire to raise his hands and tell them he was with them still. Yet soon he began to wonder if they were right. For, though he felt as if he was somehow free and no longer lying on the bed, but standing by its side and looking at the pale cold thing on it, he could not make himself known to his sobbing mother. She seemed to be separated from him as it were by a misty cloud, and he knew her no longer as he had known her once, but only in the dimness of a dream. He tried to speak. His voice sounded strangely but plainly enough to himself—the odd thing was that it made no impression on his hearers. He wearied himself with his ineffectual efforts, and, finding them in vain, thought he would make himself known in some other part of the house. He walked straight to the door of the room, intending to open it, but was taken by surprise when he found that the closed door presented no impediment to his movements. As he *passed through it* he became for the first time fully aware that he was dead—aware also of a gnawing misery of some sort—a misery which drove him away from the dim memories of his earthly life, on—anywhere to get free from a lamentable remorse which for the first time in his existence he had begun to feel.

"It burnt me like fire," he said, "and yet I was a spirit. It seemed as if I wanted no one to judge me, for I was obliged to judge myself." Every act of self-indulgence which had seemed to him so little in his lifetime came before him with a vivid reality. Urged by the desire to get away from these remembrances he came back to the room which had been draped in black, and looked at the body stretched out straight with covered face upon the bed. He knew it was his own, but could not claim a right to enter it. Then, driven by that same desire to get away from a haunting tribunal which he could not evade, he found himself surrounded by forms—some bright and

shining, floating up as it were above the earth, which lay dark beneath the stars and cold in the morning sunshine, and others pale and distraught as himself. Some in long robes, some in their shrouds, some dark with thoughtful brows, some weeping bitterly, and others uttering wailing cries.

"Why cannot *we* rise?" he questioned his companions. But they dissolved like phantoms, vanishing in air. At that moment he had a ray of hope. For there was a vision of a cross floating by, and of some who held safely to it in their extremity. The Cross rose, and he tried to catch at it; but it evaded his grasp, and was borne upward with those who held to it, and whose faces had caught the brightness which radiated from it.

"It is of no use; your fingers could not hold to it, even if you could reach it," a pitying voice said to him. And, when he looked to see from whom it emanated, it was a man whose face was grave as well as benevolent, who was dressed in one of the long robes he had noticed.

"What is it keeps me down?" he had asked others, who had been too busy with their own anxieties to have time to utter a word. But this one said, with a sound which was more like a sigh than speech—a commiserating sigh—

"It is a deadly sin. In your case it is a desecrated hearth, a broken heart, and a broken promise. Look and see."

He had not thought of looking before, but now, when he turned round, the reason was evident why he had seemed to be falling quickly down—down he knew not where. For a woman was dragging him down, holding tightly to him, and clutching with a desperate clutch, like that by which the drowning imperil the lives of their helpers. He could not at first see her averted face, for her fair hair, wet with her tears, was streaming over it. But something in the colour of that hair seemed to rouse the memory which had been in abeyance till now, and strike him with a new and more vivid horror even in the confused imagery of the dream. He must get rid of that memory and of the thing which held on to him. So he tried to shake her off, striking out cruelly and savagely. He used violence in the intensity of his effort to detach the clinging fingers which so closely clutched him—such violence that it seemed to him he was making the fingers bleed, even when he recognised the impotency of his own action. Then the face was lifted up to him haggardly and reproachfully, and he knew it, half-starved as it was, and drenched in its tears. The fingers let go their hold, but he fell the more quickly. There was a cry, as if for aid—another wail, as if of appealing pain, for he still seemed to be unable to escape from the thing pursuing him. Yet he was now conscious

of being half awake. Through his half-sleeping brain the confused imagery was still flitting, so oddly that when he seemed to hear a voice he could have been certain it was the voice of the man in the long robe who had spoken to him before, and who now said sadly: "Fool, to think of saving thyself by striking the innocent. Know that the woman is not dead, and that thou hast one chance yet. Let thy first step to a better life be the redressing of a wrong."

Three times he told me he had dreamt this dream; three times he had heard the voice.

"Now, doctor, what does it mean?" the young fellow said, raising himself painfully on his elbow and feeling for his handkerchief to wipe the moisture which stood in drops on his brow.

"H'm!" I said, feeling that I should like to turn the thing a little over in my mind before I gave utterance to contemptuous impatience.

"What does it *mean?*" he questioned again, insisting on my declaring myself as if I had been an oracle.

I cleared my throat once more, and said, as curtly as possible:

"Mean?—why, it means that you are a good deal out of health. I should have enough to do in all conscience if my patients came to me to interpret their dreams! If you want me to turn that dream into a dismal harbinger of woe, or a cheery foreteller of future happiness, I can summon one of the old hags who live on the moors, and tell fortunes from the palms of the hand, or conjure up charms from wretched toads. Shall I send you Goody Teads?"

I laughed, but my laughter sounded to me a trifle coarse, as I added:

"I am here to attend you—not to guess riddles."

"Then, doctor," he said, like the spoilt child that he was, turning again on his pillow and flinging one arm hopelessly over his face, "I refuse to take your drugs. You can do nothing to abate my fever—nothing, except for a time, to make me sleep. I called for help. I was in despair, and the only man I thought could help me—my father's friend—deserts me."

"Well, well," I answered, shrugging my shoulders and trying to dismiss from my mind the first idea that all this was simply petty and childish, "you send for me in my official capacity, and then, when your head is swimming and your heart beating, you refuse to let me soothe you with the help of medical science. You know, as well as I do, that I ought to throw up the case. But for your mother's sake who thinks you a thousand times worse than you are, we won't quarrel about trifles."

I took off my spectacles, wiped them, and then continued:

"We physiologists have means for accounting for such dreams. They are either produced by mental volition, by external stimuli, such as noises, by disordered digestions or——" Here I hesitated again; his eyes were fixed on me questioningly as I continued. "Now, to speak plainly, the reproduction of a dream, opposed to the inclination of the dreamer, and repeated vividly, unpleasantly, depressingly—well, you know there are many people in the present day who don't believe in *conscience*, who tell you it is only an inherited instinct, and that even morality is purely conventional; but for my part I hate these modern sophistries. And I tell you plainly, a disordered stomach and a clouded brain are often the result of a disordered conscience. I frankly tell you that your dream is probably the bitter condemnation by your own conscience of some line of conduct adopted by yourself."

In the silence which ensued I knew that I had hit the mark. Here was a need, perhaps, for the actual cautery, and I blamed myself in the case of this fatherless child for not having used the moral dissecting-knife at an earlier period when it was wanted. Need I say that in my dislike to analysing morbid psychology, and in my belief that there are sins better avoided by not giving fluent advice, but by counteracting them by a tone of robust and healthy manliness, I had meant to do my best? There are differences of opinion about this. But to my mind there are subtle dangers in lingering over the sickly effluvia of an unhealthy moral condition. I would rather inculcate purity of life by stamping out all that might pollute or enervate.

But, when one once had to use the probe, one had to do it coolly. In a few minutes I knew that I had indeed been sent for to conduct a delicate and difficult operation, quite outside the usual lines of my profession.

My readers will be inclined to laugh, as I was, when they hear that fees in abundance were offered to me to go to the neighbourhood of Cambridge, and search out the girl who had figured in the sick man's dream. I was to bring her home, and he was to marry her at once.

"I tell you I *promised*, and now my mother has promised. I vowed long ago by all that was sacred in heaven and earth, and I have broken my promise," he said, with returning excitement, when I was inclined to pooh-pooh the bare idea of such a mission.

"Chut! What will people say? And you are engaged to Cornelia Thelwall! The whole county will talk of it."

"Miss Thelwall must be told the truth. The promise is like a millstone hung round my neck dragging me to the depths. Would she like to be married to a man like *that?*" was his vigorous reply.

Well, all I could be thankful for after my searching examination was that "the truth," as he called it, was not so very terrible with regard to the girl of the dream as I feared it might have proved at the first outset. "Little Letty," as he called her, had been the motherless daughter of a bookseller at Cambridge, not so ill-taught in many ways but that Benjamin could well have married her. He engaged himself to her with faithful promises, none of which he had any idea of keeping. Her father had spent his life among his books, caring for rare editions, curious bindings, and treasures of the recondite sort, rather than for his child. But when he found that the gentleman who had "kept company" with his daughter had cast her off, he turned her out of his house, without investigating her story or listening to her protestations in self-defence.

"Yet she had done nothing wrong. I had simply tired of her. She was a superfluous person who had become uncongenial to me; I began to hate her and all her surroundings. I should never have thought of injuring the harmless little creature to the extent that I did. After all, it was the father's fault—quite as much as mine," groaned Benjamin, who even now considered himself ill-used.

After all, he wanted to persuade me it was not his fault! He had treated Letty better than others, simply on account of her own inherent goodness. He had acted quite up to the mark of the ordinary commonplace morality. He insisted on it that it was the father who had caused the complication!

"She would not take a farthing from me; nothing would suit her but that I should marry her; and now I never thought of the possibility that she should be dying of starvation."

"That is quite an unnecessary inference; how do you know that she is starving?" I asked.

An ironical smile passed over his lips.

"Have I not told you how I know it?"

"It remains to be proved," I answered. "Courage, my friend, keep cool. If the girl can be found, and I can induce her to return with me, and if you are still of the same mind, we will see what can be done. Perhaps some sort of compromise can be effected when I bring her."

The most difficult part of my strange task was that of explaining the matter to Benjamin's mother. At first she was too much astonished to be able to form any judgment on the

information which amazed her. Then she spoke stiffly and ungraciously, very unlike the Mrs. Arnott I had always known. Women are so often hard upon women that I ought to have expected her to make a gesture of disbelief when I told her all that Benjamin had said in defence of Letitia Monckton. Her face, refined by its own suffering, hardened when I mentioned the younger woman, and added that it seemed to be my only hope of quieting my patient to enable him to have his own way and perform what he considered to be an act of reparation.

I felt a little sore about the way in which she took it. It was hard on me that she should wring her hands, and declare that "there would be no end of a scandal." It was not for *me* to remind her that wickedness was worse than scandal. And so I had to remain silent; while she, sincerely religious and affectionate as she was, imagining that she was actuated by a sense of duty in all she did, had yet no compunction in entertaining the idea that young people very commonly made such promises as her Benjamin had made, with very little thought of keeping them. Truly Benjamin's education had been no great success, and for the first time I said to myself, "No wonder." Yet this was a good and clever woman, one whom I had always thoroughly respected.

It was no use getting hot about it. I could not presume upon our close terms of friendship by telling her that it was the difference between principle and practice in well-intentioned persons like herself which prevented the masses from realising the true teaching of Christianity. Neither could I tell her that I had more pleasure in thinking of her scapegrace son than I ever had before, now when, through the pangs of suffering womanhood, it seemed to me that a hope of redemption might be given to him.

I felt almost uncandid, as I took my leave, muttering discontentedly to myself:

"I don't believe in a different code of morals for the man and the woman. I won't believe that salvation is offered on different terms to both sexes. One side of the fellow's brain must have been pretty clear even in his sleep—at any rate it is clearer now than ever it was before. His father trusted me, and I must do what I can to help him."

Well, as I was saying before, I was slack just at that time, and my kind friend—Smythe, of Blackquay—when he heard that I wanted to be absent for a couple of days—promised to drive over to Halstead should anything requiring immediate attention take place in my absence. You may be sure that I did not confide even to my wife as to why I chose to commence

my holiday with that little run to Cambridge. It did not seem to require any explanation, for I had a sister settled there whom I had not seen for some years. It was from that sister at first —with equal reserve as to circumstances—I tried to get information respecting a bookseller of the name of Monckton. The man had left Cambridge a couple of years before, the date of his leaving corresponding with the time when he must have quarrelled with his daughter. He had gone to London alone, and was supposed to be flourishing in the metropolis. The girl had been kindly enough treated when he left, by people who blamed the old man for his severity. Without much difficulty I traced her to a linendraper's shop where she had served for some months behind the counter. But the long standing had told on a delicate constitution. I do not wait to comment on a scandalous grievance of keeping young women so long on their feet, for which there seems to be no excusable reason, but which is a prolific cause of illness, and still continues to the shame of a generation which has reformed many abuses. In Letty Monckton's case, illness had been augmented by another cause. The shop had been heated by some artificial method, and the machinery had become out of order during an unusually severe winter, not on the men's side, but on the women's. The men, no doubt, would have agitated for a redress, but the girls, being weaker, were left to shiver, and one of Letitia's arms became deficient in circulation. The hand, as my informer told me, "died away." She was forced to apply for medical treatment, and, being absent, lost her place. Here I lost the clue. I sought out the doctor who attended her, and heard that she was a respectable girl, who seemed to be suffering from some mental trouble, as well as from physical privation. I thought oddly of Benjamin's dream when he told me that on one occasion he had found her in her poor attic with her fair hair hanging down, wet with the tears which were streaming on it.

"The case was not bad enough for a hospital, and the girl was wonderfully independent. She said she needed no help," my informant told me.

Yet I began to feel superstitious, and redoubled my inquiries. What if Benjamin's repentance should have come too late? I was indeed a good deal relieved when another girl was sent to me with the information that Letitia Monckton was employed among the workers for a shop of ready-hand underclothing which needed many "hands." I lost no time in applying personally at the work-room, but the door which I had half opened was instantly closed by some uncompromising official, almost in my face. Those were the days before Government

inspection, and in that instant I had noticed that the atmosphere was fœtid, and that there were not sufficient cubic feet of air allowed for the unfortunate creatures who were closely huddled together, without sufficient window light to see the stitches which they were stitching as if for their lives. My enthusiasm had had time to cool, and I confess I began to see things a little from Mrs. Arnott's point of view, as I tore a sheet of paper from my pocket-book and wrote, standing upright at the door, a letter so urgently worded, with such offers of assistance, that I felt convinced it would be effective in bringing the girl to answer it.

I had begged her to come in person to hear of something to her advantage, and, as might have been expected, Letitia Monckton presented herself that very evening at my sister's house. In the whole course of my professional experience I never remember being more astonished. How can I make you see her that she may take you by surprise as she did me? The flippant, coquettish airs, the cheap tinsel finery, which I had learnt to associate with workgirls in her class, were all conspicuous by their absence. She had lost flesh evidently, but there was nothing to betoken excessive poverty in her appearance. The thinness was that of one accustomed to privation, and she was very pale with a pallor which convinced me that she was underfed. Otherwise there was nothing to identify her with that bilious dream. The stuff dress of some coarse material, which I afterwards heard was made by her own fingers, and which fitted her figure neatly, was of black. She had no false earrings, no pinchbeck bracelets, no twopenny-halfpenny rings, not even a tawdry brooch to fasten the plain collar, which was spotlessly clean. The gloves were very old, but well mended at the fingers, and—greatest marvel of all—her bonnet was of plain straw, neatly fitting the small head. The features were delicately cut, the nostrils were sensitive and looked, to my professional eye, suspiciously pinched. The hair, which many a lady would have envied, was neatly parted in two plain bands on the forehead, and the voice, which was low and musical, completed my bewilderment. For a minute I doubted the evidence of my senses, and if a somewhat incautious and sudden mention of Benjamin Arnott's name had not caused her to faint away in a swoon which was evidently the result of bodily exhaustion, I should have been inclined to mock at the fool's errand on which I had been sent.

"Don't you see it is *bread* she wants? Have you beef-tea in the house?" I said hastily to my sister, whom I had summoned to my assistance.

Indeed, as the poor girl afterwards acknowledged, she was in the last stage of exhaustion, and had been praying for some one to be sent to help her, having only been reinstated in her employment on the very day when I found her. It was, as I subsequently knew, a custom with this, as with many other shops, to discharge a certain number of hands when the demand was lessened, and to take them on again when the work increased. Sometimes, as many as forty hands would be discharged at a time, and in the interim honest girls had no means of self-support. Letitia, being one of the weaker ones, had not that speed at her work which was valued especially highly before the introduction of sewing machines.

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III.

I HAVE often wondered whether we took undue advantage of Letitia in her prostrate condition, or whether, if she had had time to reflect on the hasty step required of her, the good sense which she afterwards showed might not have deterred her from taking it. But she loved our graceless Benjamin with a love which had never abated, and of course we told her nothing of his later engagement to a richer woman who was already rejoicing in her emancipation, and who shortly afterwards comforted herself by making what was considered to be a far better match. I began to be alarmed at Letitia's silence as she accompanied me on my railway journey. But I soon learnt that it was better not to interfere with that silence. The quiet sensitiveness of the girl was the more easily wounded from the very fact that she did not understand all my fashions of speech. There was something subdued about her manner which gave her an air of refinement, but with all my knowledge of physiognomy I was puzzled to extract much emotion from the impassive face.

"She has gone through so much that you must be tolerant," I said to the future mother-in-law, who received her with an air of severity which neither shamed nor saddened her—again because she did not understand what it meant.

Yet Mrs. Arnott was puzzled, as I had been. Letty had no plebeian name to offend aristocratic ears, no cringing manner by which she ought to have shown that she considered her admittance into the family as a privilege. She was timid and nervous certainly, but rather from anxiety about Benjamin than thought about herself. And, indeed, that anxiety had become

so pressing as to leave no time for minor considerations. When I led Letitia into the invalid's room, his head, which he had turned again on the pillow, had become motionless, and his face was the colour of a corpse. His features were sharpened by attacks of pain, but his eyes were fixed on the opening door, and he showed signs of improvement directly the girl whom I was escorting went willingly up to him, and tried to take the hand which hung limply over the bedclothes. Even then it struck me that the improved expression of his face was less that of pleasure than relief—a relief from that remorse which is our hell in this life, and perhaps will prove the agony of the next.

There was no time to be lost. Symptoms much more serious than I had at all suspected had declared themselves in my absence.

"By all means humour him. He may never live to claim her as his wife—but humour him with the ceremony—if the girl does not object," was Dr. Smythe's openly expressed opinion.

*I* did not think so seriously of the case, perhaps because I began to feel a little guilty of treating Letty too much like a lay-figure, and of hurrying on the marriage with the madness of desperation. To the last Mrs. Arnott never thought of any one but her son, when she said: "It seems to me quite premature to be in such a hurry, but I suppose it must be, if he wishes it. I hope he will never have occasion to repent of his choice."

So the service was performed in the house by a clergyman, a friend of the family, who was summoned from some little distance for the purpose. The wits of the bridegroom seemed to be clear on the morning, but they were wandering the day before, when he talked of his wedding tour, and asked me, apropos of it, "That tall man in the winding-sheet, is he coming with us?"

It was astonishing what a difference it made when he was married. He inquired very little, to be sure, after his wife. But his eyes were no longer wild, nor his face haggard. And but a few days afterwards he was asking to be allowed to smoke, and taking the trouble which a genuine smoker always does to select his weed from the cigar-case.

Even Mrs. Arnott became reconciled to circumstances, thankful to have her darling restored to her again, and thankful also to know him in many ways improved.

During that winter they kept little or no society, and the few who saw Letitia noticed nothing that was out of the common in the bride. I was so anxious for her to take her rightful place, and commence her simple duties, that I also thought

little of her excessive loneliness. We Halstead folks were so accustomed to our somewhat melancholy winters that we did not think how the mists on the heath and in the valleys, the nightly roll of those vast moors into the great expanse of darkness, or the masses of gray cloud without so much as a slit of sunset colour beneath them, might affect a young mind completely uncompanioned. Benjamin had performed his duty in marrying the girl, and good Mrs. Arnott performed hers in straining her every nerve to make up for Letitia's supposed deficiencies, so that folks around should find no fault with her, and her son not be ashamed of his choice. Between them, they made life a very serious and grave thing, without many pleasant aspects or bright sides to the poor young woman whom Benjamin's unfeeling conduct had exposed for so long a time to the straits of poverty. But Letitia seemed formed for endurance, and no one knew better than she that life must be sometimes difficult. She never fretted them with little clouds of discontent, gusts of passion, or complaints about the wreck of her own illusions, which might have come natural to a less hardly-nurtured woman. She bore her little cross humbly—too humbly, I thought—and the most particular person could not help admitting that she bore it well.

"She has a way of bringing out what she knows. No one would think he had made a *mésalliance*, for she generally knows what to say or do," Mrs. Arnott observed, with gratification.

"What a mistake," I answered, fidgeting at the significance of the speech, "to over-educate women till you deprive them of their natural instincts! There is an intuition which takes the place of any training in logic."

It was an old subject of dispute between us. I could not tell how to explain it, but, though this girl told us she had learnt little, she was seldom at a disadvantage. The slightest hints seemed to help her to guess at what she had not learnt. It was pretty to notice how careful she was of the purity of her language. She spoke English almost like a foreigner, slowly, with careful intonation, and never saying much lest she should make a slip. One saw how carefully she had listened to others, studying her sentences and managing to put them together with an accuracy which she had perhaps acquired from her father. Certainly no one, from talking to her or looking at her, could, as Mrs. Arnott said, have seen anything unladylike in her.

All was going on fairly till Miss Delmott began to gossip. Miss Delmott was one of those women who pride themselves on

their knowledge of their neighbours' affairs. She could have told you how many servants everybody kept at Halstead, how many years each of them had been with their mistresses; whether people lived within their incomes or not; whether each member of each family was or was not on good terms with the other members; who were friends and who were enemies; who had bad tempers and who had good ones. Many were the family skeletons which this dexterous lady contrived to disinter; many were the grievances she skilfully brought to light. And all because she had nothing to do, and took such an interest in other people's troubles!

I confess my heart misgave me from the time of Benjamin's marriage whenever I dared to think of Miss Delmott. I determined to elude the lady. I thought I was a match for her. How she could have managed to get her claws into a secret which I thought successfully buried I cannot to this day possibly explain! I had not even told Jenny that Letitia had been a shopworker; the utmost my wife knew about her was that her father had been a respectable citizen, and Benjamin was so enamoured of her that he could not give her up. The philosophy of indifference with which the world generally beholds the disasters of those who are conceited had deterred any one from taking up the cudgels for Cornelia Thelwall. Besides, that lady having already married a rich landed proprietor several years older than herself, and having left the neighbourhood, was certain, for her own sake, not to revive a story which had been painful to her at the time, and which she had promised not to divulge.

I was never more mystified than when I met one of Miss Delmott's intimate friends, who told me they "knew all," emphasizing her words with an energetic nod. Everybody had suffered more or less from the pitiless tongues of these chattering women, and I myself bore them a grudge for robbing me of acquaintances whom I had valued. For certain things can always be insinuated in a small place like Halstead, which a man has no power of explaining, and which can be always believed against him. Things intangible, undefinable; but here was something more to be dreaded. Had the whole story come out it would not have been so terrible; but it came bit by bit, with the inevitable additions, the diabolical insinuations.

"Nobody visits them now," I heard a short time afterwards. "We are so sorry for Mrs. Arnott. But her daughter-in-law's place in society is substantially forfeited."

I cannot bear to repeat even a few of the speeches.

"To think that we considered her pretty well brought up,

almost superior in some things, and ended by even offering to invite her to our house!" one of the other matrons added, in a tone of horror.

Whilst I shifted my feet, and tried to control my temper, another mother carefully explained, "Association with her might degrade my poor children."

"I hope, madame, they may never be more degraded. If you wish to keep them from lowering themselves don't let them grow up talebearers," for the life of me I could not help answering, at the risk of losing a good patient.

My heart ached for the poor girl who had suffered so much already in her life, the more so that I saw no way of helping her. I wished I had never helped Benjamin when he made his confidence to me. For he had not been a good husband, and how he would treat her now I did not dare to think. It was as if the circumstances of his life had become helplessly confused from the first wrong-doing, so that wrong followed again from the mere trying to do right.

Months had passed away since I brought the bride to Halstead. It was summer again, and the day when I heard of this gossip was pitilessly hot. I had been summoned to see a patient in one of the outlying farmhouses, a couple of miles away over the moor. I need not say that the house nestled in a cleft of the lands, where it might be protected from the fierce blasts of the wintry gales. But the cleft was shallower than many, and those who built the substantial homestead, which seemed destined to stand for ever, had wisely chosen its site beneath a little pine-wood. There was no carriage road, and the path through the wood was so stony and uneven that I generally dismounted and led my horse. The path was lonelier than usual, though the views were superb. The heat was so great that no one but an artist, a miner, or a poor wretch of a doctor would have ventured out in it. As my horse trotted over the wiry turf, and then on to the bridle-path, which he and I had "travelled," as the Scotch say, so often, and which lay between the rough carpet of furze and the low covering of dense ling, which would soon be in flower, I thought I saw a figure coming towards me in the distance. But it had either disappeared again, or my eyes had deceived me. It was so easy to take a furze-bush or a piece of distant rock, which was really only a part of the organic whole, for a human figure in this landscape of desolation.

So I thought no more of it till I dismounted in the wood where I had to lead my horse over the broken stones. The trunks of the fir-trees were throwing straight shadows on the grass, and their healthy pungent odour was making the air

aromatic. I have often thought that scent is in some curious way connected with our subtlest associations. To this day that peculiar aromatic odour recalls the step which I heard falling firm and resolute on the springy turf near me, and my surprise when I found that the figure which I had seen in the distance had been a reality, and Benjamin's young wife stood face to face with me miles away from her home. My first thought was of the old lady, Mrs. Arnott, whose notions of how women should conduct themselves were very primitive indeed, founded on the traditions which her own grandmother had handed down to her. She had confined her daughter-in-law, not unkindly, more or less to the narrow bounds of Valeside. That Letitia should take a walk *alone* had been a thing not even dreamt of, and hitherto the girl had consented to have her liberty fettered, and had shown herself even tender and considerate of the mother's old-world prejudice. I saw at once that a night's agony had changed all this, and that the younger woman had "broken out," as in prison language they express it. I did not need to be told that the venom of Miss Delmott's gossip had reached her, and was transfusing itself like poison through her veins. The bite of Cleopatra's asp would have been merciful compared with it; the anguish would at least have been sooner over. I do not exaggerate when I say that the girl looked spectral as she faced me, and that my horse seemed inclined to turn back from her as if I had been a Balaam and she—well, a sort of avenging angel. She had dressed herself all in white, but her face was whiter, and her languid features seemed to have acquired a sudden animation.

What was I to do? I had no time to attend to her, and as I bowed and tried to pass her I suppose it was a feeling of uncomfortableness which made me overdo the appearance of there being nothing the matter by beginning to whistle a gladsome tune. I saw at once I had put my foot in it.

"Doctor," said she, who generally spoke so little, talking rapidly now in a way which alarmed me, "I did not know you were coming this way. I did not waylay you on purpose, but I can easier speak to you than any one else, and oh!—whatever you do—in mercy don't whistle that tune!"

"Why not, my dear child?" I asked, reining up my horse in spite of myself, and answering her in a kindly tone. For I saw that she was so agitated as to be even forgetting her usual accuracy in grammar, with her command over herself.

"*Why not?*" she repeated; and then the tears came from the eyes which had been so hard and dry. "Why not? Oh, how can you ask me? My mother used to sing it. But it is

not only *that*. The world must have been as sad as it is now when people wrote those merry songs. I wonder if their hearts ached when they wrote them?"

"Come, come," I said, speaking in a fatherly way, and attempting to rally her. "It is not like you to lose your usual self-control—and you know it is nonsense—whatever you may be feeling *now*—to talk of leaving your illusions behind you before you are twenty!"

The dark softness, which had appeared for a moment in the eyes which could be tender and sympathising, hardened again as she answered:

"You do not really think that. It is not your heart which is speaking. You know that it was to please *them* I kept up a farce all this time—kept my feelings, as you say, under control; and you know, too, that whatever I do now it will be all just the same, everything will be called forward and unbecoming."

The utter hopelessness with which she spoke told me how the calumny was eating not only into her flesh but into her very soul, destroying all the good in her. Her humility would always have prevented her from wishing to attain any eminence among her fellow-creatures, but till now I had not guessed how this girl had thirsted, rightly or wrongly, for recognition amongst other women.

"Nonsense," I answered jauntily, "never care about 'They say.' 'They say' is the most contemptible, ill-behaved creature in this world. If I met him I would shoot him with the best will possible, even if I should be hanged to-morrow for it."

She evidently did not hear what I had been saying. There was an absent look in her pallid face as if she were debating some question in her mind, and trying to screw up her resolution to ask my advice. I determined to anticipate her.

"Go home," I said; "I know as well as you do that there is not the slightest atom of foundation for any of these reports. Treat them as if beneath notice. Really, you must make haste, for you spoil that good husband of yours by paying so much attention to his comforts. He will come home to dinner and miss you. And then the day is hot now, but soon it will be getting colder, and you have only a little handkerchief over your shoulders."

"*Home!*" she repeated sadly, "it is no home for me any longer. They must not hear it—must not know it. Oh, it will make my husband despise me, and it will break the old lady's heart. Doctor, I wanted to tell you. You meant to do well for me. But when I was poor, though I thought myself unhappy, I had no time to torment myself—no time to look back."

I could have guessed this without her telling me. How in the new atmosphere so alien to her former mode of life she was becoming the victim of the tortures of her own imagination! And now, like so many delicately-nurtured women, she would, if she returned home, have nothing to do but to turn the knife in her own wounds! She was regretting even that wretched work-room, in the worse prison of the monotonous drawing-room where she had to sit with her hands before her to please well-intentioned Mrs. Arnott, or was only allowed some insipid form of fancy-work. Formerly the inevitable industry had brought with it a sense of calm, a physical fatigue, a power of sound sleep. She had to reproach herself with nothing, for she had no responsibility. Her life had been ordered for her, with no power to change anything in the enforced routine. By nature she was a dreamer; formerly she had no leisure to dream. But *now?* I had for some time noticed when I had called at Valeside, how Letitia would sit with her hands folded before her "thinking," as Mrs. Arnott called it, and how this thinking or dreaming had become her only distraction—a dangerous form of occupation for an untrained girl.

"I can't sit still any more. It seems as if I have pins and needles in my feet. I *must* get up and walk and walk. What is the matter? Am I ill?"

"You will soon be *making* yourself ill," I somewhat vaguely answered. "You must trust in Providence."

And then as I tried to pass her I was suddenly alarmed, for, as if suiting her action to her words, she had sprung out of my path, and had clambered with agility on a large boulder of rock which had been loosened by wet weather. The rock jutted over a precipice commanding one of those inevitable streams which in our part of the country are often in flood, draining moisture from the uplands. Even in drought that moisture was so superabundant that it flowed turbidly over the gravel bed, strewing it with granite stones, and colouring it with a strong solution of red clay.

"Don't do *that*," I cried, "the stone is not secure enough. It may give way at any time. It makes me tremble to see you."

"I am not afraid," she replied, keeping her footing.

"I dare say not—that is because you do not know the danger," I called, as she slowly obeyed me and came down from the perilous position. I was vexed at her unexpected contrariety, her foolhardy bravado—the more so that she muttered something about a "troublesome, useless, valueless life."

"She ought to be prevented from taking any rash step. I must give her husband a hint," I thought, as I rode on.

When I came back to Halstead she had not returned. But Benjamin was not so alarmed as I thought he would have been, and I said to myself, "She is right; he is tired of her. Why does every one who gets a thing on which he sets his heart in this strange world tire of it almost as soon as he gets it?"

I never feared she would take any wild resolution, which her common-sense would be sure to disallow. And yet I was scarcely surprised when, on the following day, it was told me that Benjamin's bride was nowhere to be found. A mysterious letter reached him, which must have been posted after dark, telling him that she never intended to come back.

"It is the only way out of a false position—the best thing I can do under the circumstances," she had written in the letter.

The post-mark was from a town some miles from Halstead, but no one there could give any information about her. Time would fail me to tell how parties of men, engaged in searching for her, strode up to the moors on that day and many following ones, with little hope of finding what they were looking for.

At the edge of the precipice something was picked up wet with the night dew. It was the little handkerchief I had noticed round her shoulders. The stream was examined and the larger river dragged—in fact the neighbourhood was hunted all over, but with absolutely no result.

"She might have thrown herself into the sea, and the body might have been floated out by the tide," suggested poor Mrs. Arnott, who, with all due regret, was beginning to think of the future of her son.

"Come now, you needn't conjure up the remotest possibility, as if it were likely to be true; that is so like a woman," Benjamin answered huskily.

I could see that a heavy sense of responsibility was gathering over his mind, and I confess that for once I was cruel enough to be positively glad when I saw that Miss Delmott was reproaching herself a good deal. She was never at the best remarkably intelligent. It takes no high-class intellect to make an interfering gossip. And now she rivalled the stupidest people, who have all sorts of inane proposals to make in moments of excitement. I met her one day looking by no means so self-contented as usual, with her brows drawn together and her bonnet awry.

"Had they offered a reward? Had they inquired from the girl's father? Had they put an advertisement in the paper?" These were amongst the torrent of questions which she poured out breathlessly.

"You may be sure all these things have been done, and

that others have suggested them," I answered, taking off my hat to her womanhood, while I soothed my indignant feelings by giving her a piece of my mind. "Places like Halstead, small as they are, have plenty of kind hearts in them besides a few cruel ones." And then I could not help adding, "I wonder you like to make any suggestion about her father?"

"Why not?" asked the lady, bridling.

"Wasn't it you who steeled the kindest hearts against her by giving out that the poor man was so broken down by her conduct, that rather than face the scandal he had taken refuge in flight?"

"It was true," she said stubbornly.

"There are no falsehoods so bad as half-truths."

"If I found out the truth about a thing, it was *my* duty to expose it," she still persisted.

"I really cannot see that it was your duty at all. Have we not all done some wrong in our lifetimes? And in a case like this, when a poor young creature of your own sex had been far more sinned against than sinning, was it *your* duty to act as her judge? I should have said, on the contrary, it was *our* duty to have defended her. You and I cannot plead the severity of unripe years. We are old enough to be tolerant to the young who are sorely tried?"

I blamed myself for going too far when I had uttered the last words. For Miss Delmott was, like most ladies, striving to keep up a pleasant little fiction about her age. I had hit her in her most vulnerable part, but I confess I had not paused to think of what I was saying. Had there been *any* softening or yielding on her part when she had affixed the irrevocable stigma to that poor girl, young enough to be her daughter, I might have preserved my usual gallantry! But, as it was, I had felt it necessary to say something which should oblige her to go *her* way and let me go mine, for I never had the least fancy for Miss Delmott's conversation. It seems I had hit on the right thing, for she did not answer another word.

And as for me, I bowed again, and let her pass.

# HOW THE FEVER CAME TO HALSTEAD*

## SEQUEL TO "MISSING"

### I.

YOU ask me whether I ever heard of Letty again. It is rather like an Irishman to conclude one story by relating another. But I think I can best answer your question by telling you of a conversation which I overheard a few years afterwards, one summer afternoon in the rectory garden, and of the circumstances which followed that quiet little talk.

There was no lovelier or more retired spot in the neighbourhood than this garden, in the "refined rusticity," as Wordsworth would have called it, of its surroundings. The architect, who must have built the rectory hundreds of years before—for the roofs were gabled, and the chimney-stacks quaint—had chosen for the site a piece of sheltered ground. Except for the fact of the blue smoke betraying the possibility of a human habitation, a stranger would scarcely have guessed at its existence, so hidden was it beneath the rising knolls, which were covered with closely-cropped grass, bracken, and furze. On one side of

* This and the following tale, entitled "Our Children's Hospital," are stories so connected with Halstead that Dr. Meredith naturally told them to me. Yet he knew that they were deficient in sensational incident, and I confess I have my doubts as to whether they will please the majority of readers. At first I intended to cut them out, but on second thoughts I allowed them to be printed with the rest, remembering the great interest which is taken by many people in philanthropic subjects.—EDITOR.

the parsonage there was a low wall, on which the yellow stonecrop grew in rich abundance; on the other, the garden was merged into the church-paths.

> Where holy ground began, unhallowed ends,
> Is marked by no distinguishable line;
> The turf unites, the pathways intertwine.

Fancy you are one of the little company sitting together under the shade of an old cedar-tree, of which every rector in turn had been proud, and I will give you the gist of what was said as nearly as I can remember.

"And is this to be the end of all your ambitions? You had a talent for organising; you might at least have set on foot some better machinery for work in London."

"You know what my London doctor told me. I speak with deference before Dr. Meredith—but I was told that, with the shaky state of my lungs, I could not expect to lead a long life in the excitement of a great city, where the evils of life are so intensified——"

"Intensified—how?" asked his companion, raising his eyebrows.

"Well, in the slums—or in fashionable life. You must admit that the former are full of no end of misery—and the latter—to my thinking, much like a whited sepulchre concealing dead men's bones and all sorts of horrors."

"Humph!" said his companion incredulously. "If there is *really* that state of antagonism between the rich and the poor, and you have the training to help, why did you accept the first quiet thing that was offered to you from St. Anne's?"

"I have told you I had not strength for more extensive work. And then the London doctor spoke not only of myself but the children"

And Arthur Denbigh's eyes roved to a distant part of the garden, from which merry voices reached him.

"But this seems to me stagnation. At best you can only vegetate, and a man of your sort, of whom such great things were prophesied, and who took a first in the schools! You are simply burying yourself here!"

"It is difficult to say what is great and what is little," was the answer, given very quietly. "It seems to me that the lines have fallen for me in pleasant places. No spot can suit me better than this secluded one near the sea."

"Set to teach people who no more understand you than you

understand them. What was the use of your philosophic training, your excessive devotion to the classics? You might as well be in the backwoods or the wilds of Australia!"

"You forget I have the newspapers and magazines, with plenty of correspondence, to keep me informed of all that is going on in all the world around me. And you must not ignore my moorland rambles. I shall appeal to Dr. Meredith again; he will be the best to tell you that there is nothing better for the repair of an overwrought brain than such bodily exercise as I get here, with the certainty which one has of acquiring knowledge no longer to be tested by examinations, even if one only chips a rock or dissects a plant," answered our new parson, determined to speak cheerfully.

"Nonsense about overwrought brains," retorted his college friend, almost irritably; "a yearly holiday is a sufficient antidote for a mental strain. I repeat that these are stirring times in which men like you ought to come to the front. Why, you used to electrify us with your speeches at the Union; I remember even now your burning eloquence, your——"

"My boyish paradoxes," answered the other, with a laugh. "It is easy to string words together; one is only afraid of not doing it rightly. I admit that I may have some trouble to adapt myself to the needs of my fisher population. Don't I know that these are anxious times both for Church and State? But I am thankful to be free from the agitations of controversy. You must not come here to make me discontented."

There was a pause. The children's laughter again rippled on the air.

"It is very good of you to over-estimate me. But, after all, examinations are no such great test of a man's merit. It is yet to be proved whether I can make the best of my small stewardship. And meanwhile," he added, with a cheery laugh, "it will do *you* a world of good to look after me occasionally, and rusticate at Halstead. I shall have my retort on you, and say that the haste and turmoil of your London life and the mental habit of hurrying, which is too often the keynote of such a life, may have its own disastrous effects. Doctor, don't you agree with me?"

The rising young London barrister, who had come to visit his clerical friend, with whom he had many tastes in common, and who had been his constant companion during the years which they had spent together at Oxford, stretched himself on the basket-chair which had been brought out for him on the rectory lawn without answering, whilst the rector, noticing that his friend's lips were compressed, as if in thought, and that

there was a fold between his brows apt to come there when he was vexed, said no more.

It was the hush of an autumnal afternoon. Golden and red leaves were lingering on the trees in the old-fashioned garden. To Arthur Denbigh and his wife and children it was a sort of paradise even now; but Denbigh himself could not help thinking that the garden would have looked more attractive to his old college chum if the latter had chosen to visit him at the time of flowering rhododendrons, or when the camellias were in bloom on the south side of the house.

Pretty enough in the eyes of an easily satisfied man, the rectory looked even now with its lattice-windows, low, picturesque roof, and neatly-tiled hall.

"It was a nice old barn enough, a sort of place to end one's days in," so his London friend had said, remarking condescendingly that it would be easy to beautify it with new wall-papers and some carved oak furniture.

"Carved oak," Mrs. Denbigh remarked, "would be rather expensive," as she tripped across the lawn and joined in the talk. She had a pair of expressive brown eyes, apt to exchange meaning looks with her husband's, which were of a dark gray, the colour of a shaded pool.

What a struggle a curate's life in London had been, and what hard work it had been to provide Arthur and the children with the little comforts she thought to be necessary for their health, was a topic on which she had never enlarged to any one.

I remember that we were all of us unusually silent. I was a little anxious about our new young parish priest, having known a succession of parsons, from the fox-hunting and drinking parson of years before; the musical parson who used to write musical scores on the whitewashed walls of his parlour; the severe and morose parson who was apt to take gloomy views of mankind in general, and the parson who had immediately preceded this young fellow. The latter was a man whom the world calls a "character," and who had supreme contempt for that outside world, and an equally exalted opinion of his own ideas, which were enunciated to the admiring circle of his acquiescive family as laws infinitely superior to those of Her Britannic Majesty's realm. I could have defied you to mention any train of thought or line of light which was not peculiarly that man's own. He was parson, sponsor, doctor, author, carpenter, in fact anything; so that he and I not unfrequently came into collision, especially on one occasion when he had nearly murdered a girl in the village by giving her a dose of strychnine.

Well, he would declare—it did not matter two pins what people said so long as he satisfied his own conscience and did what he thought right, and what (ergo) *was* right. If they did not go to church let them stay away. He for one would not be idle, and when he did not feel inclined for doctoring, carpentering, or authorship, he would paddle away at his wife's sewing-machine.

Jenny had accused me of always sparring with that parson, so that I naturally was rather anxious about the new-comer, to whom she said I had taken one of my strong fancies.

I was uncomfortably aware of a slight change in our social atmosphere. For, flattering as James Fortescue's talk had been in its constant allusion to her husband's cleverness, it had evidently jarred on something in Mrs. Denbigh's heart. For one moment I thought that her usual shyness might be burnt out by a stronger feeling, and that she would break in on the young man's talk with some eager disclaimer which she would afterwards regret. It was apparently with an effort at self-control that she retired again to another part of the garden, all unconscious of the fact of what a pretty picture she made with her little fair-haired children helping her to feed some pigeons which were flying about her head, while our new rector's big dog reclined at her feet like a lion couchant watching her proceedings in great amaze.

It was like one of those musical pauses which sometimes occur in the full-toned chorus of life.

Not a sound was to be heard in this autumnal afternoon, not even the twitter of a bird, only the rushing of a little stream which ran through the garden.

I was much interested in the character of Arthur Denbigh, perhaps the more so, that—though I complained at times of the unremunerative labour which, whether we liked it or not, we country doctors were often compelled to perform—my very pride in my own profession, as a benevolent though an ill-paid one, made me sometimes willing of my own accord to attend patients for nothing. Not only was the living of Halstead a very ill-paid one, but I made a point of seldom charging either parsons or teachers, and the very fact that I did *not* charge them made me the more anxious "nicely to observe" with patient, exact observation. I do not hold with romance theories in the way of physic, and yet I think that the mysterious is often the practical. At the first sight of the young rector I questioned if there was so much the matter with his lungs as he himself imagined. But it was a case in which the mind had an unusual effect on the body, and—paradoxical as it may sound—I have

often been convinced that those practitioners who begin by studying the body of the patient rather than his mind and character, begin at the wrong end. So I was only carrying out my favourite plan when I dropped into the rectory garden that afternoon, and took notes of my new acquaintances.

I remembered how Molière answered Louis XIV. when the latter inquired about his doctor :

"Oh, sire, when I am ill I send for him. He comes ; we have a chat and enjoy ourselves. He prescribes. I don't take it, and I am cured."

My wife blamed me for being a garrulous old fellow at times, as full of ancient and harmless jokes as of deadly solemnities, but the wish to talk deserted me as I sat wondering what the thoughts of my new friends might be.

I could guess as Denbigh got up and paced the gravel walk, watching the beings who were dearest to him on earth, how he was arguing with honesty that he *ought* to be content with getting a rest from the worrying and harassing toils of life, and how he was registering a solemn vow to do all he could to brighten the life of the little woman who had been jaded with the care of children, and who had suffered from more than ordinary cares before she came to Halstead. Yet, to use a hackneyed simile, he was much like a young war-horse scenting the battle in which he was not to be allowed to distinguish himself.

And I was ready to anathematise the law-schools, the Bar, ay, and the very wool-sack itself, as I guessed how the other man was saying to himself :

"How quickly a rash thing may be done and a fellow's prospects spoilt by a pretty face ! Now, if Denbigh had not been such a Quixote, and in a hurry to take upon himself those family cares and responsibilities which shackle the cleverest of men, he would not be so content to sink into oblivion in this confounded hole. What a come-down for an aspiring spirit like his—to have to spin long yarns to a few fisher-folk ! And then the most painful of all ideals—love in a sort of cottage."

As for Nora Denbigh, though she tried to turn her thoughts by feeding her pigeons, the smile did not come again into her downcast face. And I could fancy that she mused :

"It was a mistake to invite that man here. His world is not our world, nor his thoughts our thoughts. Arthur thought his society would be a capital tonic. He talked of him as an excellent fellow, but surely he has the weakness of lacking the single eye. As if we *could* be too thankful, when Arthur broke down in health, that this living, though not a rich one, should come to him—through the senior fellows all refusing it. And

now when he only read himself in last Sunday, and has to preach for the first time to-morrow, it must be rather a worry to him as it is to me to have this man choose a Saturday to break in on our peace!"

Understand these were but speculations, only fit after all for an old fellow like myself, who knew little enough about his younger neighbours. And just as I was wondering whether our highly-strung young rector, and his wife, who had also a faculty for taking things to heart, would ever live to be a "John Anderson, my jo," sort of couple like Jenny and myself, with the children grown up, and able to enjoy a St. Martin's summer of domestic happiness with the garnered wheat of a rich "aftermath," James Fortescue seemed to recognise that the pause was becoming oppressive, and—pulling himself together—said, with a shrug which he barely repressed :

"Well, if you think it would brace me for my other work, I might run here now and then and take a bath of oxygen. But for the mental atmosphere—the stir of thought, the friction of mind with mind, and of men with men—commend me to London. You were always a good-natured fellow, Denbigh, for looking on the bright side of things—what is it you parsons call it—the silver lining of the cloud? By-the-bye, you have plenty of clouds here," he added, as he looked through a place in the hedge where the evergreens had been cleared to let in a glimpse of the rise and fall of the never-resting waves, on which the gloaming was now beginning to descend, "and plenty of rocks, and caves, and creeks, and all that sort of thing. But I should feel that one was rather apt to degenerate into an oyster-like life in the midst of it."

"Say a sea-anemone ; we find plenty of them among the rocks," said Mrs. Denbigh, who had come back to us and was laughing with her usual good-humour.

To do James Fortescue justice, I had not the least doubt that he really was somewhat riled at the fate of his old friend, and that the tone of depreciation was quite unconscious in his voice as he added :

"The place will be a good deal prettier when you have furbished it up."

It was before the days of the Art revival, or he certainly would have asked if the little woman could carry out the new ideas with the promising material she had to work upon.

"Ah, in London you do everything lavishly, but I fancy we shall be content with the pretty, wainscoted walls of the dear old rectory," answered Arthur lightly, though I could see that he was vexed. "My wife takes an interest in everything that

is good and true, but she would rather see me restore a part of the dilapidated old church than spend a lot of money in the adornment of the house."

His eyes rested somewhat anxiously as he spoke on the face, which was pale as well as fair, and on the attitude of the figure, which was graceful though perhaps a little languid. He hoped that the wild roses, which seemed to have disappeared from the face that had once been sunny, might bloom again in the cool, "pure, medicinal" breezes of the place. It had not escaped him that Nora had refused to be included in the conversation, and that she had slipped away as if in sudden impatience directly Fortescue began to grumble about Halstead.

James Fortescue had, indeed, scarcely cared to hide that he was irritable and discontented because the brilliant prophecies that had been hazarded concerning Denbigh's future seemed now to have such small chance of being fulfilled. Why should Denbigh choose to be Quixotic, and throw away some of the best gifts with which Fortune had endowed him? After his University honours he might be a writer of pre-eminence, or in many other ways a leader of men. James had chafed at the idea that his friend was throwing himself away when the latter had decided to go in for theological reading, but that he should hide himself in this secluded, seaside hamlet was like burying his talent under a napkin with a vengeance. If it was too late to persuade Denbigh to give up his freaks of enthusiasm, he might at least secure the best position for himself in the strange world in which he had elected to live.

"Well, I must be gone," he said, "if I am to catch that train. The Rip Van Winkle sort of feeling is coming over me already in this Sleepy Hollow of yours, and I declare I had nearly forgotten the time. But I confess I am a little anxious about you. I attach a good deal of importance to that first sermon of yours. Some of the county magnates will come from curiosity to hear you on your first Sunday, and you ought to try to do yourself justice even in the depths of Sandshire. I sha'n't give up my hopes of better preferment for you yet," he added, waving his hand as the dog-cart drew up to the door, and the new young parson's "man-of-all-work" took his place beside him to drive him to the station.

"I couldn't offer to go with him myself. I am sorry he came on a Saturday, he has upset all my ideas," said our new rector, with a sort of sigh, as we stood looking after him from the gate.

I could see that he was beginning to be dissatisfied, and that his dissatisfaction was due not so much to foiled ambition

as to the supposed selfishness of which he was beginning to accuse himself, for lingering in a "Sleepy Hollow" where there was so little to be done.

"My right place would have been amongst the London poor," he said, with a repetition of the sigh.

"And what may you mean by *that?*" I asked, irate. "If you suppose it is only in London that the utterly illiterate pig is content to wallow in filth, and the half-educated pig wakes up and wonders how it ever managed to live without clean straw—and squeals for fresh, you make a great mistake," I added, having it on the tip of my tongue to tell him something which would frighten him, and then thinking better of it when I remembered his children, and one little boy whose look of delicacy had set me thinking.

I had not the heart to destroy his perfect confidence in the salubrity of Halstead, so I stopped abruptly, and only remarked: "You are just the sort of fellow who would be hoodwinked in the slums of London. I have no doubt you *were* hoodwinked to any extent as a curate."

He muttered something about deserting work. But I had the advantage of years, and thundered at him:

"Leave the fate of Quintus Curtius to men who have more experience and stamina—you'd be swallowed up at once.* Why, my friend, it requires *years* of sober practical training to deal with the poor anywhere. The pagan stuff on which you were suckled at Oxford; the gentlemanly dread of oratory lest it should degenerate into rhetoric, or the quiet, non-inflammable attitude which fears to take fire at a strong emotion will not reach the working classes *anywhere!*"

"*Really*, doctor!" he remonstrated.

"Well, I make apology. It was your friend who made me angry. The eager struggle for prizes amongst your great lawyers—the competition for Church preferment, which is even more humiliating—makes me glad, yes, really glad that I belong to a profession in which the striving is of another sort. I don't believe you care about such prizes, neither are you as tepid as some university men. Still all your mental culture and your knowledge of books won't make you understand the *patois* of the other nation which lives on the opposite side of the ocean, and laughs in turn at your jargon."

"You mean the working man?"

"Who regards you as his natural enemy. Take my advice.

* The doctor was not alluding to the present anxiety about the East-End of London. The state of the London slums was never worse than in the year 1848.—EDITOR.

Get used to the ways and character of the rural poor if you want to be used to the urban. The same difficulties will crop up after a time in fresh centres. Study your preventive measures, you country clergymen, and learn to address Hodge in a language which is not Hebrew to him."

I felt I was digging him a little roughly in the ribs. But then, I knew my man, and knew also why I wanted to prepare my young prophet for an emergency.

He answered, with admirable self-control, perfect good-nature, and that modesty which—if it made him seem at first sight a little flavourless in his unobtrusiveness—was, after all, a speciality of his university training:

"I am afraid the difficulty will be to get them to church. They are not in want, they are never ill, and I should hate to demoralise them with charity."

I had gained the point which I had wished to reach.

"Ah," I interposed, "how do you know you will not be wanted in their own houses? They are seldom ill at present. It is a healthy place, I grant you. But supposing we were to have a good rattling epidemic?"

Before he could ask whether I spoke in jest or earnest, I had grasped his hand, and made my way back to the village.

I left, feeling myself a bit of a coward, but I did not like to interfere with that Sunday sermon of his. And then I had not tested his metal as yet. Men of his stamp seemed to me to be so sensitive—I had almost said finnikin—as to be keenly alive to trifles which generally affect women only. "He is sure to put his own interpretation on what I said, and to credit me with a deeper meaning than I had myself," I thought, as I stopped one of the maidservants, and asked her to see that little Philip Denbigh was warmly tucked-up that night, and put early to bed, without alarming her master and mistress.

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II.

I HEARD afterwards from our rector himself how he gave more than one other sigh as his wife sat down by his side with just a little solicitude in the rare fineness of her expressive face. He did not like to acknowledge to her how he was disappointed with the result of his friend's visit to Halstead. It was as if a different light had been turned on the scene.

"I suppose," he thought, "it does not look to an outsider like a place to cheer the harassed mind."

"You shouldn't have listened," his wife said, beneath her breath.

"Nay, you must not be hard on Fortescue. He wishes me well, and we should always be willing to see things from another's point of view," he rejoined with a repetition of the sigh, as he looked with regret at the smooth young cheek, from which the roses had been so early scattered, and to which he hoped the air of Halstead would blow them back again.

At that moment it was in his mind that he was like a fish out of his natural element, and he had perhaps been a little precipitate in paying too high a price for his own and Nora's health in accepting this out-of-the-way living in Sandshire when the other fellows of St. Anne's had refused it.

The evening air was becoming cold and damp as his wife drew him into the study, where the lamp was already lit, and paper and pens placed ready for finishing touches to be put to the sermon.

"Don't wish for a more intellectual companion," she said, with a ready smile, as she urged him to write, "but try to think of what you will say to the natives."

He balanced the pen in his hand.

"Perhaps the doctor was right—the men in Whitechapel were keen-witted. We sometimes got almost the worst of it when we tried an encounter of words. But here one must be careful not to speak in an unknown tongue. I remember, when I was a small boy, how I used to imagine that sermons were preached in German or Hebrew. I dare say they will think so here. An old fellow asked me if I meant to give them 'somethin' good from Abraham or Paul?'"

Nora laughed as she seated herself by his side with the garments which she had to mend for her little children. It was an old and pretty habit of hers, and she was in high spirits in consequence of this change to the country. Yet Nora Denbigh would have scorned to belong to the number of those women who make it their business to detach men from high and noble ideals, to treat them as domestic pets, and who, after bringing a man down to the level of what is small and contemptible, congratulate themselves on having concentrated the affections of their husbands on themselves. On the contrary, she would have incited him to all that was truly great. And this evening, as she sat occupied only with her fingers—guessing that there was a whirl of conflicting thoughts in the man's brain, and yet keeping to her rule of never intruding upon it, lest she should interfere with those floating "thought-motes," which might be so quickly blown away by indiscreet speech—she noticed her

husband tear up more than one sheet of paper, and throw aside half-a-dozen pens, as if he were fighting to keep down some rising irritation before he said :

"Fortescue was right—I cannot preach that trash which I wrote at the beginning of the week; much may be expected of me to-morrow."

"The sermon seemed to me to be good."

"Ah, you see, tastes differ."

"As different people's conception of life differs."

"You heard what Fortescue said?"

"He said you had a useless fancy for self-immolation. Grand words, but quite unnecessary in the way in which he used them."

"He was always like that. You never could stop him when he was fairly under weigh about anything."

"I confess I wonder what you could have in common."

"Don't you know that in friendship there should be a difference as well as a likeness?" answered Denbigh, trying to get rid of the thought that there was a widening gap between himself and his old college chum. "It isn't that I care for fame—becoming a celebrity is a mean sort of thing to aim at—but if there were some real hard work to do in this place?"

The habit of doing things musingly, and doing them by degrees—a fashion among the natives of Halstead at this twilight hour—seemed to have fallen on the husband and wife as the rector looked at his manuscript with a halting dubiousness.

Just then both were startled by a knocking at the door. Arthur Denbigh rose to open it himself. His notions, as Fortescue said, were primitive, and seeing that it was Saturday night, and but two or three steps to the front door, he thought there was no need of troubling a servant to answer it. Most likely it was a message from one of his parishioners. In another minute he entered with an altered face.

"I have been sent for to see a dying woman," he said, with a return of his usual energy. "It is miles off over the moors. I must go at once."

"And the sermon?" asked Nora, a little disconcerted.

"Oh! the sermon must take care of itself. It is unfortunate that I tore a part of the first copy; but I can fall back on an old one."

It was a moonless night, and the dead opacity of the midnight darkness obliged Arthur Denbigh to take a lantern to help him to guide his steps over the grassy hollows, and the primeval stiles over which one might turn an ankle or jar a spine. He

passed, with a boy leading the way, over the brown, untameable ground which had never yielded crops to the most patient tillers of the barren soil. There was no light but the glimmer of the lantern by which to see the aged road and the still more aged moor, with its old primitive garments of moss and grass, and its ancient barrows, about which antiquarians had speculated. Now and then there was scarcely light enough to see the narrow path. It seemed to be a wilderness howling and desolate, and Denbigh's heart sank more than ever as he thought how he should have to adapt himself to the frowning moods of this gaunt and sombre nature. He was still conscious of a sort of oppression, caused possibly by Fortescue's talk.

"A night on a solitary waste like this, with sea and sky meeting, may suit a thorough-going ascetic," he thought as he bent his head to the biting blast. "I can quite see how Fortescue, with his artistic nature, should feel a little sadness and oppression in this place."

After this he had little time to think. For there was a gradual series of ascents over ridges, stones which cut the feet, and furzy hollows which pricked the ankles and tore at the trousers, till he stood at the door of a little farm-house, built strongly enough to resist the howling winds, the saturating rains, and the snow which in winter fell heavily on the moor.

At the door of the farm-house stood the young farmer, his eyes bleared as if from night-watching or the unwonted shedding of tears. His speech, which was never apt, was less ready than usual as he grasped the hand of the new parson and led him without explanation to his wife's sick-room.

The scene which met Denbigh's eyes was one painful in the extreme. On the bed at one side of the room lay a woman whose eyes were unusually bright, and whose cheeks were flushed. The scared little children had cried themselves to sleep, but the aged mother had remained by her daughter's side, her frame shaken by the sobs which she was unable to control. On the other side sat another woman, who was employed as nurse, holding an infant in her arms, while the husband stood hopelessly by the door, his stolid face wearing the expression of one who was dazed and making helpless attempts to understand the sorrow which he had to face.

The woman in the bed was still young, but her cheeks, once full, had become sunken and hollow; the hands which lay extended on the sheets, as if for assistance, were thin and had lost the flexibility of the joints, yet the eyes were still beautiful in their look of urgent entreaty. She seemed to be conscious only of her own personality, that of all other beings merged in

her own. The children who were sleeping, the husband who had been good to her, and the mother who could no longer help her seemed to be blotted from her memory. The eyes wore an agonised expression as they were turned on Denbigh.

"Oh, sir," she cried, in tones which he could never forget, "tell me—where I am going? What is to become of me—for it has come upon me all on a sudden-like—and I am afraid—afraid! The church were so far away from us and I didn't think so much of other things as I had ought to ha' done. And now—and now——"

She could not finish the sentence.

Life with the sheltering arms of those whom she had loved, and the joy of her nestling babe had been hers but a short time before, and now death had come upon her like an armed warrior not to be gainsaid. It was as if the yawning ground had opened beneath her feet, in the twinkling of an eye, suddenly and unprepared for, and her solemn self-accusing cry went up to heaven, retarding the chances of her own recovery.

"The doctor hev' gone and left me, and now there is no one to help but you."

But the doctor had not gone. He was standing just then outside the door, though he knew that it was not he who was most needed.

"I was hoping not to be obliged to send for you, but it is a case of panic," I said, in an aside to Mr. Denbigh; "the emotions of the mind have a great effect upon the body, and it is pretty well known that fear under certain conditions may have a fatal effect. If a man or a woman even in perfect health may become paralysed by the effect of one overpowering impression—how much more we may have to apprehend in a delicate state? It is the fault of the gossiping nurse. There is typhoid fever about in the village, and our patient, who was recovering slowly from her confinement, has been worked upon by the visit of some itinerant preacher (they are nearly all preachers, you know, the miners about here; the comical part of it is there is scarcely any one to listen)," I added, in necessary explanation, "and they have a fancy for horrors. In this case a mysterious tapping has been heard—they declare it is the death-watch—and what with one thing and another—the woman is certain she is dying—she is under the delusion that she has taken the fever."

Of course he started a little when I had to acknowledge there was typhoid in the village. It was the information I had dreaded to break to him. It reminded me of the old story of the man who thought to secure for his only son an immunity

from danger by shutting him up in a tower; the fatal viper being conveyed to the lad in a bundle of sticks. Arthur Denbigh had come to Halstead thinking it a health-resort, and lo, and behold! the first epidemic I could remember had attacked us at the very onset.

I looked at him with some anxiety, but he only said quietly: "Then she has *not* taken typhoid?"

"No, I think not. But she may have fever of another kind, which may be quite as serious, and your help may be just now more efficacious than mine."

"You will go home?"

"I cannot leave her in her present state, and there are others waiting for me. In an outbreak of enteric fever, this sort of panic is infectious, and our people are *very* ignorant," I answered, wearily enough; "there is a caul—have you ever heard of a caul?—which has been consulted as a fetish."

I had determined before I left the house to investigate the supposed death-watch. Yet indeed I had to respond to the demands of others, and I was worn out.

Those were days when the working classes were under a singular delusion respecting us. It was next to impossible to disabuse them of the idea that they had a right to insist on a medical man leaving his bed and doing all sorts of things for them for the most trifling payment or none at all, while at the same time they could afford to pay their butcher or their baker. I confess I was sometimes rather sore about it, yet confident in a case like this that the new parson would not complain any more than I did. Were we not both members of humane professions? Ought we not to be careful each never to violate the feelings of the other? and was I not glad when a harmonious and friendly understanding could exist between the two professions, which in dealing with body and mind were so constantly in need of each other?

"We are both at home in a sick-room, and this is a case in which I have need of you," I said, still speaking in an aside. "Every hope for this woman's recovery lies in the possibility of calming her mind. She is in one of those unmanageable states in which opiates take no effect. For we cannot get her even to close her eyes." (We had not then discovered the use of the morphia-needle, and she was violent when I attempted to give her sedatives.)

And while I was musing to myself, thinking that Burton might have written an "anatomy of panic," as well as of melancholy, and wondering why the perception of danger should in

some minds be so strong as to cause the power of self-control to be utterly lost, I heard the nurse, whose stupidity had caused the mischief, say, in a deprecating tone :

"She was no worser than her neighbours. There's her Bible on the shelf as she read allus on Sundays ; but t'other parson he never cam anear us, ye see, and the Methody chapel was all across they moors. And then when the dog began a-howlin' and turnin' his face that way to the east, we knew as how it was the way her sowl ud go."

"The dog has nothing to do with it at all, my good friend," said Mr. Denbigh, with considerable patience, which checked me in a more angry exclamation.

How much of the excitement might be due to disease, and how much to the real awakening of an anxious conscience, it was impossible for either of us to decide. Still less was it a time for reproaching the penitent.

Denbigh afterwards told me that, if it was a moment for reproach at all, his vexation was with himself for the dissatisfied thoughts which had but lately forced themselves into the background of his mind. He had been complaining of an absence of important work, and here was one of the sheep in the wilderness to be helped in good sooth. I determined to retire to the adjacent room to pretend to get a snatch of sleep, even if I could not succeed in securing it, the more so that I felt inclined to assault that nurse.

"She's been like this ravin', prayin', and despairin'-like, for the hour past," I heard her say, as I left the bedside, leaving the door a little open that the atmosphere might be improved, and that I might hear enough to be on the alert directly I was wanted.

"Praying is better than despairing," answered Denbigh's voice, clearly enough to be heard. "But in some states of weakness we are not expected to do much of either. In the wreck of our earthly hopes we all try to cling to a bit of the wreckage, but every soul which yet lives has a Rock to rest on. Hold to it, my friend," he added, in a cheery, ringing voice. "It is the Rock of Ages ; it will not forsake you. You need not think of dying—think of *living*, both in this world and the next. You want that rest as much now as we shall all want it in the future."

"I know what he means," the sick woman answered, raising herself on one of her arms. "But I forgot—oh, I forgot all about it—and it would be coward-like to expect Him to recollect me now."

"His name is love—infinite love. Though you may have forgotten Him, He has never forgotten you."

I had heard enough to make me sure that I had done right in sending for Denbigh, and that I should hear of my patient sleeping soon. I had time to give my attention to the supposed death-watch. Tap, tap, went the worrying sound. It was not a cricket, as I supposed at first; nor could it be the branch of a tree outside the window, for the night was calm. Yet the cause was not far to seek; for, as I gently opened the window, a piece of wood tied by a string, which had probably been used as a wedge, fell on the gravel beneath. The string had been caught in the window-sash, and the piece of wood so balanced that it had probably vibrated with the gentlest breath of air, swinging when once it had been set in motion.

The stars were all up—the innumerable stars—though soon the light of the early morning would be appearing over the sea, and I thought of the words of the Hebrew poet, "Thou callest them all by their names," and wondered what he would have said if he could have known that owing to the discoveries of modern science more than forty million worlds had been brought under our ken? And then a pleading voice, which rose and fell soothingly on my ears, and which was raised to a higher pitch than its wont, reached me from the next room:

"O Thou, who didst take upon Thyself the utmost agony of our human nature, who didst know and pity our weakness, draining the dregs of the bitterest cup in Thine own passion on the cross, that Thine arm should not be shortened so that it could not save——"

I closed the sash quietly, taking in the piece of wood, but somehow the words stuck in my memory as I sat near the window with uncovered head, gazing at the gray light of that autumn morning creeping into the room—half dreamlight, half daylight—as the faint stars went out one by one, and left me with some half-formed speculations, of which, perhaps, as I was not a theologian, I ought to have been ashamed. Speculations with regard to that greater world of the Unseen, and of the other visible worlds, reminding one of the "many mansions" which the Master in whom Denbigh believed said He had gone to prepare; many homes for shivering souls, with schools, perhaps, for the untaught, and manifold provision for degrees of progress. Through it all I could not help thinking of Denbigh's earthly home, and wondering with some anxiety if the old rectory had been left in a proper state; for the architect who had inspected it at the change of rectors, in my opinion, scamped the health arrangements.

Meanwhile the watchers in the adjacent room had become wonderfully quieted. Denbigh's voice had sunk so low that I

had to open the door gently to hear the words, "Good shepherd, who came to seek the lost, have mercy on all Thy wanderers!"

The husband, whose huge frame had been shaken by the efforts to repress his emotion, and who had trembled and shivered from time to time, sat now quite still, with his rough hand shading his eyes. Soon we heard the sound of measured breathing, and, as I stole up to the bedside, my patient was lying in peaceful sleep.

"She will do now," I said, giving directions to the nurse, as Mr. Denbigh gently laid down the hand which had relaxed its eager grasp on his.

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III.

It was nearly seven o'clock when we went out together into the fresh morning air. Neither of us spoke much. The vast expanse of the moor, which had seemed to be so sombre in its darkness, lay outstretched, like a motionless scroll beneath the sky; the outline of a grand bluff could be just descried rising boldly from the distant sea, and beneath it the waves of the broad Atlantic rippling lazily like burnished fish-scales. The atmosphere near the horizon was graduated into those various strata of glorious colour so beautiful to watch in the early morning, while the sun itself, like a fiery ball, was illuminating all with light. The mortification which had been caused by his friend's remarks on the previous evening seemed to have passed altogether from Arthur Denbigh's recollection; neither did he seem to have any anxiety about the fever. Other ideas had taken possession of him, to the exclusion of vague regrets. He seemed to be in a state of exaltation.

On the previous afternoon it had made him melancholy to remember that the very rocks and plains over which our feet were treading were formed from the graves of countless generations of plants and animals. But not now. I could almost have smiled as he told me that it felt to him more like the dawn than the death of the year, and burst into the utterance of thoughts which became rather like a monologue than a talk between two persons. Of how it was not easy for any soul to go rapidly down a backward path on whom the detaining hand of the Life-giver had once been laid; and how there was no such thing as death in a universe where essential life was in the Life-sustainer, the Life-perpetuator, and that because that Life-giver lived His people would live also!

I did not interrupt him. I had had my doubts, as most men of my profession have had them; but I had long considered that the true attitude of science was by no means antagonistic to Revelation—that, in fact, we are bound to infer the reality and probable existence of a cause for every effect.

I knew that Arthur Denbigh was an enthusiast. And when he began to blame himself in no measured terms, seeming to forget that he was speaking to a comparative stranger, and saying:

"We see the affairs of our little span of life as if at a distance, just as if we had passed into another sphere of existence, here in the early morning with the sea beneath us, on these moors. Doctor, I am more and more convinced that mortals have nothing to do with what is great or what is little, and that the sanest view of life is not the secular way of looking at success!'

I laughed and said that young men had something higher to aim at than being embryo judges or bishops, and he laughed too, and accused me of insulting him.

Indeed, I by no means wished to discourage his enthusiasm just then, as I had to break to him the full account of that outbreak of what we should now call milk-typhoid—owing to milk being supplied by a farm which was deficient in its sanitary arrangements—and which was just now making its appearance in the neighbourhood of Halstead. The provoking part of it to my mind was that it was owing to preventible causes. The object of medicine is, as every one knows, not so much to cure disease as to help people in health, and when the conditions of health are fully understood—as possibly they may be in the twentieth or twenty-first century—it is conceivable that the culpable carelessness which generates disease may be treated as it deserves, as a punishable crime. I knew of two or three sick people already whom I should require Mr. Denbigh to visit—in two cases, at least, the fever was likely to go hard. I had seen them both the previous night, and was going to see both of them again as soon as I had taken a little food.

"And I thought there was so little work to do here! Well, *you* have had no proper rest to-night, and have given up so much of your valuable time. Yet I greatly suspect that you, as well as I, are like the Italian philosopher, who said that 'time was his best estate,'" he answered, still not easily damped, as he thanked me for the timely warning so necessary for his own children, milk forming the staple article of infant diet.

Was the warning timely? I had intended that it should be so, having already warned the nursemaid, but I noticed that there was an anxious look in Mrs. Denbigh's face, and tired lines

beneath her eyes as she welcomed me that morning—although the inference was that it was only ourselves who had been up all night. She gave me a warning look as she took me aside, telling me that her little boy had been feverish all night, but that she did not want her husband to be troubled about him till the morning's service was over.

"He has had so much to try him already, and I dare say it is nothing—but you will call in directly you have had your breakfast?" she said appealingly to me, whilst to Denbigh she remarked, trying to force her usual smile, "you will have to look out an old sermon now."

"Don't you see how my wife's anxious look reveals how frightened she is that I shall preach a terribly bad one? As if the prayers were not of more importance than the sermon!"

Well, I afterwards heard how Arthur Denbigh preached that day for the first time without notes. I am not, as I say, enough of a theologian to be able to judge how right he was in reasoning that there are special occasions when a man may believe the words will be given him which he is to speak. But I know that the simple words which he uttered that Sunday morning were remembered for many a long day afterwards, going straight to the mark, and rousing the consciences of our simple fisher population. The rough miners who rarely listened to anything spoken by a parson, and who generally preached themselves—coming to church now and then from curiosity—were said to have lifted their heads at the very first sentence. Many of the women shed tears. It had seemed to some of our former rectors as if the problem of suiting church teaching to the comprehension of the simple people was almost insoluble. One of the fellows of St. Anne's had somewhat scornfully declared that these men were like mere organisms endowed mechanically with life, with as little to say for themselves in the way of politeness or sympathy as the monotonous landscape in which they were doomed to spend their days, and that it was as difficult to touch their hearts as to make any appeal to their intellects.

Somehow Denbigh did not find it so. His somewhat white though not effeminate hands were gripped by many a horny and honest fist after the service was over that morning. So intent was he on mixing freely with his new congregation, and putting himself on a level with the people, that he did not at first miss his wife. And when he hurried home with glowing face, I confess I dreaded to tell him that my well-meant warning about the milk had been given indeed too late, and that his little Philip—the brightest and most intelligent of all his children—was already showing symptoms which alarmed me a good deal.

IV.

He bore the information better than I could have expected, when I remembered the warm affections of the man, his singularly impulsive nature, and the fact that he had accepted the living of Halstead mainly on account—not only of his own health—but that of his family.

"I heard such glowing descriptions of the place," was the only complaint he allowed himself to utter.

"And you heard the truth," I answered, at my wit's end; "this is what they call an accidental circumstance which might have occurred anywhere. Yet like most things that we call accidents, it might have been prevented."

Then the man spoke characteristically, for it was evident I had only taken in one side of his character. I had been afraid that his high culture and his evident sensitiveness had destroyed the virile qualities on which I had put high value. But I had forgotten the muscular training of our public schools. Instead of breaking into lamentations, there was something energising in his speech.

"Doctor, the child *must* have the best nursing—the best that we can do for him to promote his recovery. I have always agreed with Kingsley, who said that for every child who perished prematurely, for want of due precaution on the part of the parents—for every little life cut short, we shall have to give an account. Doctor, you must get me a first-rate nurse."

"Your wife is a host in herself," I said hesitatingly; for alas! we were, like many other people in the provincial towns and villages, without proper nursing arrangements. Years before, Miss Farley had made an effort to found an institution at Blackquay; but owing to foolish gossip and small contending jealousies—squabbles about doctors, and squabbles about church matters—our nursing institution had broken down.

There were trained nurses still at the general hospital at Blackquay, and trained nurses (two of them when needed) at the children's hospital. Otherwise our nurses were either sluggish and insufficient, or domineering and given to drinking; I could recommend none of them.

But when Mrs. Denbigh went about the sick-room with that look of patient endurance on her face which one sees in the faces of mothers whose little ones are ill, and when the child, who was an intelligent little fellow, full of brightness and promise, lay half like a crazy thing on his bed, with the curly

chestnut locks shaved off—Arthur Denbigh repeated with emphasis:

"I do not mind what we pay—even if I am poor, I can make it up in some other way. At all costs we *must* get a good nurse."

Now it so happened that my prejudice had been strong against sisterhoods, but I had come to think that when, after a certain age, women did not marry, they might do a great deal worse than band themselves together, and devote their time to good works. I still hated the idea of their binding themselves with vows; I was like most men of my generation in shaking my head at such a mistake. But I had so far overcome my old-fashioned notions as to write occasionally to a so-called "mother" at the head of one of these sisterhoods (whom I happened to have known in my youth), and to request her to send me efficient help for certain cases. On that very morning I had heard from this estimable person, and she had surprised me by saying that, though one of her very best nurses happened to be at home, there was a difficulty about sending her. A difficulty which could not be easily explained in a letter, but which was of so serious a nature that unless the case was a very urgent one, requiring immediate aid, she did not like to urge the sister to undertake it, in defiance of her strong objection.

I was a good deal mystified. But when Denbigh urged me I wrote again to the effect that the case *was* an extremely urgent one, as it depended rather on good nursing than on anything which a doctor could do, and that, if the nurse were not sent at once, I could not answer for the consequences.

The fever was spreading at Blackquay, as well as at Halstead, and my time was fully occupied with attending important cases and paying flying visits to the meetings which had been convened when it was too late, to consider how it could have happened that, when we prided ourselves on the health of a certain locality, and when disease seemed to be almost stamped out of it, Nemesis should reach it in the form of poisoned milk. Town-councillors, as well as doctors, were wonderfully on the alert, the more so that, though we took blame to ourselves, it was a sort of blame which was diffused, resting with no very great weight on the shoulders of the many. I remember how I had been making an indignant speech to the effect that the present rules in the art of cow-keeping were radically wrong, and that, as the connection between these ruminants and the human race was so intimate that the maternal nourishment of the one was actually made to do duty for the other, we could not too strongly insist on wholesome and even sweeping improvements.

A letter was put into my hand when I left the meeting. It was from the Sisterhood, saying that the nurse would arrive that night, and begging that I would consider myself bound in honour not to question her respecting her former life. If I did not write to the contrary, I was assured that my silence would be taken as a promise.

"Pshaw!" I said to myself, as I stuffed the letter into my pocket, "these people magnify their own importance. It comes of being deprived of the society of the other sex. As if the woman's antecedents could concern me in the least."

Nevertheless, I was relieved when I heard that she had arrived. For the boy was alarmingly ill, and my heart bled for the young parents, to whom the cup of sorrow was so new, and who were trying to hold it so bravely. I was doing my best. But just then I was so overworked, with my hours of sleep cut short, and the elements of exhaustion in my anxiety and fatigue, that I blamed myself for being hurried hither and thither in such a state of high pressure that even my meals were hastily eaten. A medical man has never any excuse for hurrying one case because he is required for another, and I confess it was a considerable relief to me to find that I need no longer rise at night for Denbigh's child, since the lady who had arrived showed a soundness of knowledge about her night-nursing, implying depth rather than superficiality, which was rare to meet with.

Well, people did not *then* purchase cheap physic at co-operative stores at the risk of being poisoned, and they did not have little shilling manuals, telling them how to make gruels and poultices! I need not enter into details which would be dull as ditch-water, dry as sand, to those who are not doctors and nurses. But I never had any difficulty either with regard to drugs or invalid cookery as soon as Sister Margaret arrived. Everything went by clockwork; everything in the room was bright and pretty, and you would have thought a mouse was treading across the room, so lightly did she tread, when the roseleaf colour was returning to the little one's face, and he was dreaming in some of his first refreshing snatches of sleep. It was pretty to see how, when the fever was at its highest, the nurse would fan him for the hour together, and hold one of his little burning hands in hers to comfort him, and how, when he got better, he would peep at her and hide his little face in the sheet, while she sang him soft songs, and even began to spin a top for him as soon as he was better.

"Well, Doctor Meredith, you are a wizard! It is almost like a miracle," said Denbigh, in his delight, when his boy was restored to him.

I knew that the joke was to hide his emotion; and I answered him in his own coin.

"Ah, the early Christians were persecuted as sorcerers, but they afterwards turned the tables on men of our profession, and accused us of being in league with the devil! So you credit *me* with a sort of medical witchcraft! I assure you there is nothing mystical in my art. It is honest Sister Margaret who is the sorceress. And, now I come to think of it, there *is* something uncanny about it. What with the white flaps which she wears at the side of her face, and the way she turns round when I want to have a good look at her, I declare I should scarcely know her again if I were to meet her."

"Oh, that is your prejudice, doctor," laughed the young rector.

For we all felt as if a weight were removed from our hearts, and as if the icy breath of the Angel of Death, for the second time, had but just passed by a household. Even the clock on the mantel-shelf seemed to tick less gravely and solemnly. Then the blinds, which had been lowered, were one day drawn up, the time having come when light and air would do much for the little patient. I knew and triumphed in the fact that the mysterious lady would no longer be able to hide herself in the twilight; and, being not above a practical joke, I managed one day to enter the room by a baize-door which was rarely opened, and to meet her face to face before she had time to put down the child, whom she had just been soothing to sleep by one of her soft, musical ditties.

"*Letty!*" I exclaimed abruptly, so much was I taken by surprise. "Forgive me, I mean Mrs. Arnott. How, in the name of heaven, did you come here?"

At any other time it would have made me smile to see the instinctive movement which she made with her little well-shaped head, reminding me of a swan preparing to dive into the water—so anxious was she to hide her familiar features from the glare of sunlight which was streaming into the room. And then, as if realising that it was too late, she put up one hand to screen herself, and I saw that she would have uttered a little scream, if she had not done her utmost to restrain herself for the sake of the sleeping child.

She was pale and rather thin, as if she, too, had been wasted by fever; for, after all, there is nothing like a mental struggle for consuming the very forces of life.

"Why did you do this thing? Could you not guess how hard it would be upon us all?" I asked, speaking a little sternly. For I remembered the anguish of fear which we had

most of us felt, and the agony of mind her poor husband had gone through on the day when she first disappeared from Halstead—how women had looked askance at him as they conversed together in low tones of pity, and the men had neglected their work to make search for the corpse.

"Dr. Meredith, how can you ask me? Remember your promise."

So angry was I with what I conceived to be her trick, that I was not even touched by her manifest discouragement with everything in life, and her anxiety to blot out her own individuality.

"No such promise should have been extracted from me. I should not have thought the Sisters would have connived at such an absurdity. A certain man, named Herod, made a promise, and thought himself bound to keep it, and so, if I remember rightly, did another man, named Judas," I blurted out, in my indignation.

She had spoken before in a dead-alive—slow—sort of a tone, as if her lips were the organs of some other spirit, and did not belong to herself. But now she was roused, as I have often seen women roused, even when they have attempted to assume the most solemn and reticent manner, by a sort of instinctive rebound of the feminine nature which cannot bear injustice, or unmerited blame. She was roused, not for her own sake, but on account of the Sisters. Her constrained and guarded manner, which convinced me that she had determined to prepare in some way for an interview with me, should it prove inevitable, was now suddenly cast off.

"It was not the Sisters' fault," she said indignantly; "they saved me from suicide. If they had not taken me in out of charity, when—when—I was intending to drown myself, I should not be here now. You cannot possibly think me more wicked than I think myself," she added, in a strain of self-condemnation. "Nobody can think more badly of me than I think myself."

"I don't wish to undervalue your capacity for wickedness," I answered, in tones which I purposely made sarcastic, "but I don't see why you need credit yourself with double-dyed depravity, just because a gossiping woman was foolish enough to drive you mad."

A faint change—hardly light, more like the dawn of light—came into her face. I watched it as I continued, still sarcastically:

"You can't say that I take an unwarrantable liberty in referring to the existence of your husband. He used to be loud and dashing—proud of his 'get up,' when he was young. Time

was when the girls thought him a taking young fellow—all the worse for him, for the matter of that. But now his coats may be cut anyhow, his boots even are out of shape, which perhaps is the reason he goes heavily as if there were weights on his feet."

The smile that curved her lip in spite of herself was not exactly one of vexation.

"Dr. Meredith, you were always kind, but I think you a little bit unreasonable," she said. "I shouldn't have let him marry me in the way he did. I was not what he expected. What girl ever did answer to the high ideal which a fastidious lover or husband expected her to conform to?"

"Men who expect such things should educate wives for themselves, as the author of 'Sandford and Merton' was said to have done, and a fine mess he made of it too," was all I dared to grunt, rather to myself than to her—supplementing it by a noise expressive of strong disapproval, which could not exactly be found in a respectable dictionary like Johnson's.

Not only had she grown high-flown at the convent, but must have been taught a lot of new things—so it seemed to me. But that Benjamin should be credited with unattainable ideals was a matter too wonderful to admit of speech!

"You will say nothing about it? I am not a Sister, you know. I could not take the vows. But I wear the nurse's dress, and am known by my second name, Margaret. My parents gave me names which were unnecessarily grand," she said, with her sad smile, "and I thought there could be no harm in dropping the first—Letitia—one of the Sisters told me it meant something like gladness."

"That was not like you. It is at least calculated to be misleading. Time was when you would not stoop to any sort of subterfuge. You were in a reckless mood when I met you last, but you are not reckless now."

"Yes—I was reckless enough," she said, with a sort of repressed excitement.

"I don't mean to pry into your secrets. I don't expect any one to confess to me, but I think you cannot be quite comfortable in forsaking your natural duties."

She did not think of saying anything in self-justification; evidently the Sisters had told her as much.

"The search went on so long as there was a shadow of hope, for some months—the advertisements for some years."

She bent her head. Though she could talk about Benjamin's "ideals," she had not credited him with so much dogged perseverance.

"He was very sorry."

"He would be more sorry if I came back."

"He thought it was the end—he told me so—but he could not be sure of it. Has it never occurred to you that he was somewhat cruelly punished? He could never marry any one else. He did not *know* you were dead."

"That was the reason I wanted to drown myself," she said, in a low tone. "Dr. Meredith, you *know* I tried, but I had no courage, and after I heard what they said about me it was as if I could not resist the terrible impulse which came over me—as if something *made* me run to the ends of the earth."

"People who accustom themselves to gratify those sort of impulses very soon lose their mental balance. I have already made that excuse for you," I said, still speaking bluntly, almost harshly, feeling it to be necessary that I should so speak.

"Oh, and I felt afterwards as if I had been taking unfair advantage of him. I should not have let him marry me."

"Depend upon it, when you thought so, the proper equilibrium was still a little upset. It is no good lamenting over spilt milk. The question is what to do *now*. Your husband is ill."

She changed colour at my words. Her solemnity of mood, her determined air of self-deprecation were suddenly carried away by a rush of sympathy.

"*He is ill?*" she repeated, forgetting herself, rising and putting down the sleeping child. "Not seriously?—oh, doctor!"

"It all depends on the nursing," I answered, evading the question of "seriously," and confident in the success of my scheme.

The fact was Benjamin had the fever lightly, but as he was now a lone man, his mother having died about a year before, it was true that he needed a little feminine interest in his case.

I saw my advantage and hastened to pursue it. I gave her no excuse but to make the choice then and there. Denbigh's child was well enough to be left to the care of his own mother, who now was longing to have the sole charge of her boy.

When I look back upon it, I feel as if I was a shocking old humbug, and hope it is one of the sins for which I may be forgiven. For I arranged the sick man in a bedstead with the curtains closely drawn, and told the nurse she must sing to him as she had sung to the sick boy.

"Sing to him! Oh, I have not sung for years—except perhaps to a little child, and only think—suppose he should know my voice?" she whispered, with a frightened look in her large dilating eyes.

The very thing I wanted him to do, though I did not dare confess the truth. And while I was remonstrating with her, and dreading a return of the self-abasement which I had thought exaggerated, the man's ear had caught the rustle of a woman's clothing.

With a peevish exclamation which I had also expected—Benjamin still retaining some of the faults of the spoilt boy—he exclaimed at the unexpected singing, which was commenced with a sort of quaver, the concentration of feeling having made the voice husky.

"Who in the name of all that——?" he was beginning, and then stopped, taken by surprise.

For the disguising flaps of the white cap suddenly fell back from the woman's face. That cap was always an abomination to me. I am afraid I forgot myself so far as to jerk my coat-sleeve against it, noticing that it looked like a top-heavy appendage, easy to disarrange, and that the soft brown hair, which was a vast improvement on it, was fortunately appearing.

I muttered something in excuse of my own awkwardness. I had meant to say something explanatory about poor Letty, but it was quite unnecessary. For Nature took pity on her, and came to her assistance. It was as if her limbs were suddenly weak, and gave way beneath her. The faint was the actual physical result of her mental trouble. For a little time we had to give more attention to her than Benjamin needed himself. And he, who had begun to accuse himself of weakness for entertaining that shadow of hope which had stood him in good stead for long, and who had been told by more than one of his friends that it was in vain to cling to it, suddenly took heart when the hope became reality.

Perhaps a very impassioned meeting and a touching reconciliation between the two would have been too much to expect. But the result proved better than the most sanguine of us could possibly have foreseen.

# OUR CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL;

OR,

## "ELLA SINCLAIR'S COMMITTEES"

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### I.

"DON'T you think you have been long enough over those accounts, dear? Doctor, I wish you would tell my daughter that it is a mistake for her to run the risk of injuring her own health for the sake of doing good to others."

The widowed mother appealed to me with an unconscious sigh. She was a gentle, pleasant-looking woman, who had settled at Halstead on account of a chronic delicacy of health which hardly amounted to disease, though she had constantly occasion to consult me. The daughter was a young woman who set all my theories at defiance. And I was somewhat alarmed as she answered, with a little of that irritation which is caused by overwork:

"How *can* I do too much, when I have told you again and again, Mütterchen, how I so enjoy work, and cannot exist without it? Better a thousand times to wear out than rust out. And, as to appealing to Dr. Meredith, he will tell you that those who work hardest last the longest—that the brain is better for using, like other parts of the body. There was Lord Palmerston, there was Mr. Disraeli——"

"You are not a Prime Minister," answered Mrs. Sinclair, with a smile.

She was one of those quiet women who seldom assert themselves, but she would not on principle give in to the American idea that mothers are to take the lower place, and surrender their

natural position as guides and helpers to the children who have been entrusted to their care.

"No, not a Prime Minister," answered Ella, with a ready augh. "I was going on to other examples, only you stopped me."

And the little mother laughed too. For the two understood one another, and, when people are happy, it takes but a trifling joke to make them merry.

"I know what she means," cried this new experience of a girl, coolly turning to me. "She means that I should like to see a woman in office, but I am not quite sure I am so far gone as to like to see Mr. Disraeli succeeded by somebody in petticoats. I only claim for myself the right of helping the distressed. Surely the desire to do the best for one's own sex, and to avert unnecessary dangers from women, is a grand one?"

It was twilight in the room. And, as the girl rose and stood by the fire, the pure outlines of her face and figure were thrown into vivid relief by the darker shades of the paper and furniture, as if she had been a perfectly-modelled statue. Yet by the aid of the fire I could see that the colour had flooded her face, and a light glittered in her eyes. She was pretty so. And I was still hesitating to interfere, still trying to take in this new type of girlhood, that I might do justice to it. It was the mother who broke the silence.

"I did not say that it was *not*. But, oh! Dr. Meredith, I sometimes tremble for my child. She takes things so earnestly, everything goes so much to her heart; every small failure, every fancied neglect of these outside duties which she imposes on herself. I wish she would remember what Milton said,

"They also serve who only stand and wait."

There was a little quiver in Mrs. Sinclair's voice, and I could see from the expression of Ella's face there was no need for any interposition of mine. The girl was well-grown and perfectly healthy. But I felt a bit of a hypocrite when I took her part to her mother, saying, with a smile, as I looked at her earnest face:

"The structural growth of the brain may, as she says, be developed by healthy exercise. If any special function of brain, or, as we say, 'mind,' is to be developed, it must be trained, Mrs. Sinclair."

The elder lady looked puzzled, but the younger one rewarded me by a bright smile.

"I hope your daughter allows herself sufficient time for exercise and recreation?" I said, pulling myself up a little.

"Exercise; yes," said Mrs. Sinclair slowly, "but not recreation—not enough, I am sure."

"That is bad," I remarked, shaking my head. "If she does not allow herself time for recuperation—if undue strain is put on any one faculty, if——"

Here a cup of tea went over just as Ella was pouring it out. I always suspected the girl of spilling that tea on purpose. For when she handed me another cup a few minutes afterwards, there was a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, and I thought I detected a wicked expression of triumph.

I dare say she looked upon me as an old fogey whom it would be easy to outwit, and was determined I should not hedge round my ill-advised admission with all sorts of exceptions to the rule. Well, perhaps it would be easier for me to keep my eye on the daughter quietly, as the anxious mother had asked me, without talking about it. Ella Sinclair *had* been a little over-educated, no doubt, according to my old-fashioned ideas. But as yet the schoolmasters had not put learning in the place of her natural instincts. So long as there was room in her nature for both, and so long as I could see that her heart was in its right place, and ready to smite her for the smallest neglect of her mother, I could not persuade myself that I had any excuse for obtruding my ideas.

Had not the committees in which she took so active a part for one so young, and the busy thoughts which matured so quickly in her young brain, occupied her a trifle too much, to the detriment of home duties? Had there lately been quite time enough for that sympathy, that sweet communing of heart with heart, to which she had evidently been used with this mother of hers? Was the elder woman pining and her health suffering in consequence? I felt that all these questions might safely be left to the girl. She had evidently a fine and honest nature, and a sensitive conscience whose warnings she had never been used to neglect.

These thoughts had no sooner crossed my mind than Ella, oblivious of my presence, put down her pen quickly on the ink-stand, arranged her papers with deft touch, so as to leave them in order, and then drew a footstool next to the chair on which Mrs. Sinclair was sitting, and settled herself on it in a loving attitude, which evidently came natural to her.

"You must leave the tiresome needlework and have a croon with me directly Dr. Meredith goes to his other patients —in the gloaming, you know. Really, Mütterchen, I ought to turn the tables upon *you*. Doctor, please to tell her she is wearing out her eyes poking over needlework when there is not

the slightest occasion to do so. I wish all needlework could be done by machinery. It is my turn to give a scolding."

I had been getting myself into my great-coat the while, and affected not to see the tears of joy which stood in the gray eyes, not yet dimmed by age, as Mrs. Sinclair pressed her daughter's hand and caressed her bright hair. I dare say I was a sentimental old fool to tell myself what a pretty *genre* picture the group would make, and even to let the thought flash through me that, if *we* had had a daughter, I should not have been very sorry if, like Ella, our daughter had been ready to devote herself to good works, to abjure lovers' rhapsodies, and to belong, as this girl laughingly said she did, to an "anti-matrimonial society," it being understood that she should not neglect the duties of housekeeping, or relegate to female servants the care of her mother. Professionally speaking, I was bound to admit that a habit of idleness among women, and a vacuity of mind which too often led to brooding in solitude upon trifles, was one of the most prolific causes of hysteria, and even melancholia.

Yet all the same, if the young only knew how a tender or a petting word comes like heart-ease to the old, helping them to carry their burdens patiently, I think they would oftener give it.

Mrs. Sinclair had been impulsive and enthusiastic in her own youth, like her daughter. This bright, intellectual girl was the last left to her of her children, and she had long ago been called upon to part with the husband of her youth. But she was one of those whose trustfulness was no mere talk. Blow after blow which had fallen upon her had only left her calmer and more firmly grounded in her steady belief in that goodness which would yet reward her. She would have thought it presumption to talk much about religion, and yet, as Jenny said, the old lady always reminded her of one of those grand and weather-beaten pine-trees rooted on rocky soil, with unstirring branches made all the steadier by the weight of gathering snow.

My heart was never heavy for her. It was a part of that profession which I had chosen to be constantly brought in contact with suffering fellow-creatures, and if you to whom I tell these tales do not care to hear of men and women who have suffered, I advise you to listen to me no further. For my own part, I always found these experiences full of interest as well as usefulness. I was glad to know men and women like Mrs. Sinclair, who seemed to have put their foot on trouble, as Michael crushed down the dragon, and who were full of hope and courage as well as trust.

But one could not expect the young to reason in the same way. One could easily understand that a high-spirited young

woman like Ella revolted from the somewhat irksome routine of life in second-rate lodgings. She and her mother lived in the suburbs of Halstead, and if they had not exactly to bear the pinch of poverty, their circumstances were somewhat straitened, and they had to dispense with many superfluities in their dull, respectable quarters. I remember the flash of humour with which the girl once pointed to the only ornament on the mantelpiece—a little fibbing French clock—which pretended to tell the time, but never told it at all, and which was surmounted by an ugly imitation bronze representing Christopher Columbus.

"I am so heartily sick of Columbus, that I declare I should even like some Cupids for a change," exclaimed Ella ironically, "and you know Cupids are my detestation. Whilst as to those atrocious wax flowers, one of the delights of being rich would be to be able to dash those miserable travesties of Nature to pieces. At present it would be too expensive a luxury; the landlady would charge for it."

One of her constant sources of wonder was how her mother could bear such ugliness, and be as quiet and uncomplaining as she was. Had she loved her mother less, she might have supposed that Mrs. Sinclair was not conscious of the wretchedness of these commonplace details. But her quick intuition told her that once, perhaps years before, Mrs. Sinclair's pulses had thrilled as quickly, and her heart had beat as strongly as her own. Told her too that though the feelings, as she said to herself, had "gone deeper down," in her mother's case, yet the emotions were still as intense as her own, only transmuted into something different, less comprehensible to the younger woman, whose impulses forced her to energetic action.

"No one need be dull while there is plenty to do," Ella said to me vehemently, when I pitied her for her loneliness.

Kith and kin they had none. Their family had never been a large one, and such distant relations as they had were not anxious to own their poor relations. Introductions they had none. So that when they first settled at Halstead I was half anxious about the girl. She could not walk in the streets of Blackquay without people turning to look at her. There was something so unusual in her quick, energetic step, her queen-like carriage, her rare type of beauty, her clear-cut and noble profile, and the transparency of her pallor. One could not wonder that the mere sight of such a girl should quicken the pulses of the young fellows who watched her as she passed them. She was never conscious that they watched her. She had said herself that it was only people who led objectless lives who had time to think of such nonsense as what they looked like. I verily

believe that if the most eligible of these young fellows had told her that he loved her, she would not only have refused to leave her mother, but have replied that she had no time in her busy life for an all-engrossing passion.

Heavens! What would our sentimental mothers, who spent their spare hours on Richardson's "Clarissa," and considered it their duty to faint at the sight of a spider, have said to this revelation of nineteenth century maidenhood? How would they have wondered at this self-dependent young creature, trudging on all alone in water-proof cloak, utterly unconscious of her own good looks, with the unheeded rain beating on her fair, innocent face! How they would have shuddered if I could have told them how I constantly encountered her in what they would have considered to be dangerous thoroughfares!

Well, it was easy for me to understand how for the first six months after the widow and her daughter had settled at Halstead, it seemed to Ella as if she never would be able to find much in common with the prosaic and slow-going people of our little seaside place. She confessed to me that she wondered if the briny air had anything to do with making people stolid, or if the gentle lap of the little waves on summer days on the sandy coast which lay beyond the belt of shingle had a soporific effect which could account for the atmosphere of drowsiness which seemed to her to encompass the place. I admitted that a few of the outsiders who came even to Blackquay called it a "dead-alive sort of place," a hole "well enough to die in, but certainly not to live in."

"People come here, you know, who wish to shun their kind, or who want to cast their shells like lobsters in some world-forgotten sort of retreat," I admitted to her laughingly, when she questioned me about it.

"But I thought you had a town council at Blackquay. What is your town council doing? It seems to me you are behind in all the new improvements."

I shrugged my shoulders. The fact was, I had been so occupied with my own hard work, that for some years past I had been unable to snatch time enough from my own incessant round of toil, to press many new improvements upon the town councillors of Blackquay. My conscience reproached me for not taking much interest in new plans for the public weal, and so I answered shortly:

"You had better talk to Miss Farley."

Now Ella had not only not been introduced to this kindred spirit, but Miss Farley was away on one of her suffrage tours. Miss Farley, it must be confessed, was getting a little super-

annuated, and most of the societies which she had set on foot had dwindled for want of helpers—that lady's political instincts having forced her to mingle more with the busy outside crowd of workers and thinkers. It could not be said that she had forgotten the quiet hamlet of her adoption, but she was more and more inclined to plead that if the wish of her heart could be fulfilled, and her sex relieved from its present political disabilities, all minor good things would come in the train of the greater one. Ella nodded her head and shook it as she listened to this explanation. Her nod meant that Miss Farley was to be admired for the way in which she was spending not only her time but her large property. Her shake of the head meant that the inference the older woman had drawn, and the way in which she was letting things drift in our "Sleepy Hollow," were deplorable mistakes.

I tried not to be cynical at Ella Sinclair's youth as I heard the girl contrast Blackquay with other places she had known. A contrast which was all the more striking to her because she and her mother had just come from one of those towns in the north which are not only famed for their whirl of men, but for their love for stirring thought. I tried not to be misanthropical, and to control my laughter as she enlarged on her horror of those straggling streets and picturesque homesteads, which in my secret heart I had always preferred to rows of little red-bricked houses in formal towns, with tall black chimneys puffing out clouds of smoke, and that bustle to which the operatives of manufacturing towns get accustomed. I pointed out to her that the clear atmosphere of Halstead suited Mrs. Sinclair's weak health, and Ella—full of poetic fancies when she gave herself time to indulge in them—had at last acknowledged that for people who liked seclusion there might be a spell of enchantment in the place, and that she herself might be perfectly happy in it if she could find sufficient work.

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II.

HAPPINESS, it must be explained, for this young woman, as for many others in this restless age, might very aptly have been defined, in a great philosopher's words, as the "constant reflex of unimpeded energy." To whine after being happy in the way which Carlyle fitly ridiculed, would have seemed to Ella unbecoming, maudlin, sinful. But to be idle was to be miserable, an axiom which the matrons and maidens of Halstead were

very slow to admit. They described Miss Sinclair as leading a "driving sort of a life." I really think, if she had been sullen and discontented, they would have liked her better.

"I declare it makes me feel as if I were stuck over with pins to look at her," complained one of the ladies, who was perfectly well contented with her own pussy-like sort of existence of eating, sleeping, or basking in the sunshine of the good things of this world.

"Electricity, perhaps! But it would take a good many electric shocks to wake up Mrs. Harcourt—the girl's activity has something very restless about it," observed another lady, somewhat sarcastically.

The latter, who lived at Blackquay, aimed at usefulness in a common-sense sort of way, but was no despiser of the good things with which the gods provided her. And what with picnics, garden parties, little dances, croquet and lawn-tennis parties, when that amusement was still new, Mrs. Merser was apt to postpone indefinitely her plans for doing good.

"The child is perfectly foolish. I was inclined to take her up—but it is difficult to reason with her, or to make her understand that there is no such pressing hurry about all her little plans for reform," Mrs. Merser said to me. And I believe I was obliged to confess that young people were somewhat merciless in their ideas of fatigue.

"Why cannot she come *here* and make herself agreeable instead of being always on the strain?" the lady had asked me, rather pettishly.

But I, who had interfered once or twice in my life, when there had seemed to be pressing need for such interference, had determined not to mix myself up in other folks' affairs when there could be no possible reason for doing so. I refrained from hinting to Mrs. Merser that Ella and her mother had a secret dread of becoming associated with the constant gossip which they found to be one of the principal amusements of the place.

"My child is too young to express her disapproval of it," Mrs. Sinclair had said.

Indeed, to a capable young creature like Ella, the kettle-drums and garden-parties in the neighbourhood of Halstead were, comparatively speaking, dreary, wearisome affairs. Involuntarily she also felt that many of the women would never like her. They had called on Mrs. Sinclair, but did not "take," as they expressed it, to her daughter. The way in which that young woman lived, as they said, in her own peculiar groove, self-contained, and much occupied, refusing to identify herself

with any of their little cliques, having even been known to commit the treasonable offence of denying herself to visitors in morning hours, proved that she "set herself up," as they declared, to be superior and strong-minded.

But after a time there was a perceptible change. There are women with a talent for organising, for finding out the capabilities of others, and setting them to work in a way that makes them like it. And our clergyman—who had found that Ella was invaluable to him, and that the girl had instinctively put her finger on many of the weak spots which could be remedied by benevolent effort in the poorer parts of his parish—made much of her, and even helped her to set new projects on foot, not to speak of reviving others which Miss Farley had let drop.

Committees which had languished for want of funds, or become disorganised for want of energy, were suddenly revived —no one exactly knew how—it being skilfully suggested by Ella that these committees should be held at the houses of the more influential ladies of Blackquay and Halstead. Prominent names appeared on these committees, names of people who were to do nothing but patronise as presidents and vice-presidents; Ella placing herself in the background—she was only the secretary. Even Mrs. Merser's name was accorded as president by her, while Mrs. Densley and Mrs. Hooper usually figured as vice-presidents. Miss Elsey was even persuaded to undertake the post of treasurer.

If the girl had any sense of humour in marshalling her battalions, no one could have guessed it from her matter-of-fact business manner. Nothing, apparently, could give her greater pleasure than to undertake all the work, whilst a comfortable glow of satisfaction was kindled in the bosoms of these matrons who had not to stir from their drawing-rooms while they presided in dignity over the Ladies' Sanitary Committee, the committee for the furtherance of higher education among women, the committee for providing recreation and religious instruction among shop-girls, the committee for teaching working mothers how to take care of their babies, and a lot of others which, even to hear of, set one's brain in a whirl.

If Ella was great at some of these things, she never boasted of it. She had her reward in finding that the whole place was less moody and listless, and less apt to register all the minor offences of its inhabitants. For Halstead, like the Sleeping Beauty, had stretched itself, and, rubbing its eyes, had found itself to be awake. Probably it was just in time, as the population was greatly increasing. The sensation, at any rate, was a new and exciting one, and, though the little hamlet yawned

still sometimes, on the whole it rather preferred the new state of things.

Mrs. Sinclair was the only one to suggest that Ella was overdoing it, and that those who worked the hardest did not always work the longest.

"Inky fingers!" she exclaimed, warningly and laughingly, one day when I lingered, as I did sometimes, for a cup of tea at their lodgings.

"Oh, Dr. Meredith will excuse me, it is only just because he has caught me—*I* am not Mrs. Jellaby—I leave that to the matrons."

"*I* thought it was the overworked daughter who was guilty of the enormity," the elder lady said, still remonstrating, and laughingly protesting; "I have been overruled about many things, but I draw the line at inky fingers. Don't you think she would be wiser, doctor, if she threw more work on the matrons?"

"But it gives me more power to set mistakes right, and in most cases they *think* they do it all."

"I don't like it, Dr. Meredith. She is losing her healthy looks."

"Oh, my looks must take care of themselves."

"I spoke of *health*," said the mother, with an appealing glance at me.

"I never was better," rejoined the girl.

Mrs. Sinclair shook her head, and I thought of making myself scarce at the risk of scalding my throat with hot tea.

For I was getting old enough to be perhaps a little too indulgent to a strangely-attractive maiden, whom I knew it would be all but hopeless to attempt to plead with or coerce. She simply smiled at my sallies, and my feeble attempts to make merry over her imprudence. Whilst as to drawing imaginary pictures of what might happen to herself, with any prospect of getting her to listen to me, her mother might have known it was simply ridiculous.

I could only copy Mrs. Sinclair, and shake my head in a way which I felt to be almost senile, as the girl continued excitedly:

"You would condemn me to lead a useless life. There are people complaining of ennui—oh, I wish I could tell them of all there is to be done! I wish I could persuade them how delightful it is to feel as if the days were never long enough for what you have to get through in them—so much to be learnt—so much to do! A busy life can never hurt one. For my part, I should never care even about a paradise in which

people had to sit with their hands before them ; I don't believe in a heaven like that."

She was trembling with excitement, instead of being dignified and methodical, as she generally assumed to be. I saw that the reaction could not be very far off, and that she was beginning to be like a clock overwound, which might suddenly run down.

Yet she was beautiful so, and it seemed cruelty to foretell a possible breakdown. Any face must have been worth looking at lit up with such unselfish emotion, even if it had possessed no regularity of feature. The folds of her simple dress rose and fell, and one could guess at the beating of the young, earnest heart, while the large eyes seemed to gaze far away at widening horizons.

"God forbid that I should check you, dear!" said the mother, with the sympathy which, in spite of her occasional anxious anticipations, she was in reality ready to give to her child. "By all means do what you can to keep your own little corner of the world fresh and green, but the watering begins at home—doesn't it, doctor?"

"'Laborare est orare,'" cried Ella joyously.

A few months afterwards nearly every one was remarking on the girl's altered appearance. She had thrown herself heart and soul into her projects ; and was still such a generous, bright-spirited creature, that I could not bear to find fault with her, and had to stifle an inclination to laugh when her mother told me one day that she wished her to speak to me about her health, and when instead the girl dashed past me, rushed into her room, and locked the door.

"There is absolutely nothing the matter with me, except my temper," she said to me, in an odd, characteristic way, the next time I met her. "I have never been the least delicate in my life. But yet I keep on saying and doing things which I am sorry for directly I have said them. It is just as if some one is stroking me the wrong way, and I am obliged to burst out and give the mother a bad time of it."

"Nerves," I answered, shaking my head. "It is because your nerves are rasped, and your strength overtaxed."

"Do you really think so?"

"Of course I do. You are perpetually on the strain, and you accuse yourself of childish ill-temper, when it is simply a case of being out of tune. The whole system may become ill-tuned. And, if I were a *maestro* in an orchestra, I should insist on having my instruments properly tuned."

She laughed and shook her head.

"But I am not ill."

"Not ill at present, perhaps; but fatigue is a potent factor in the case. It is bringing on illness, and, if you make yourself really ill, you will be acting selfishly."

I saw that my shaft had sped home. Selfishness was a fault which this girl abhorred.

"Dr. Meredith," she said appealingly, "you took my part before."

"There can be no taking of parts in the matter," I answered, a little gravely. "If you will persist in taking up burdens which are too much for you, it *must* lead to mischief. The stress of work must fall on the nerve centres, which are the sources of energy. The man who is too great a coward to endure the miseries of life, and who deliberately performs an act of suicide which he believes will end all, is to a certain extent logical and rational —especially if he thinks the doctrine of annihilation sound. But there is another sort of suicide which is far less rational, because it is often performed by those who know the value of life, and who by no means believe that death is the end of life. If you persist in exhausting the reservoirs of nerve force——"

She stopped me by her appealing looks, her readiness to make apology. She actually left it to me to prescribe for her the exact amount of work which she might yet be allowed to perform. This is not a sensational story, or I might have harrowed your feelings by describing an incident which had happened but a short time before to Ella, who had been the first to pick up a poor suffering child knocked down by a pair of horses in a busy thoroughfare at Blackquay. It was just like her to take the little writhing form in her arms, and when she found that the little one was an orphan, and was doomed to be helplessly crippled, it was like her also to use the untoward event as an excuse for the speedy formation of a children's hospital. It did not require much insight into her character to know that the children's hospital was the work she liked best.

The project of a convalescent ward to supplement the hospital for the sick children of the poorer class at Blackquay, as well as Halstead, was so brilliant an idea that every one wondered it had never occurred to the brains of the richer people in the neighbourhood before. Perhaps the fact was that Miss Farley had generally been left to take the initiatory step in movements of this sort, and, as she complained of the world being over-populated, she had not bestirred herself so much about the little ones as their elders in distress.

At any rate, the idea was a novel one, and was taken up as soon as Ella could get me and one or two of the better-known

doctors at Blackquay to give our sanction to it. With committees I would have naught to do. But so little did the leading members of my profession deserve the sarcasm flung at them some time afterwards by our Poet Laureate—a sarcasm so little in keeping with the usual nobility of his writing—that I think I may say the greatest and the best have ever proved the most tender in their attendance on children, as well as the most free from mere greed of gain. Pity, and a sense of community in death—always most piteous when shared with the innocents—are common to all mankind. And many of the more benevolent and leading magnates in the neighbourhood were willing to have their names put on the list of the so-called workers. They must have known that they did no work, and very rarely appeared on the committee.

But it is usual on these occasions to combine the wisdom of the serpent with the harmlessness of the dove, and Ella knew what she was about when she again fostered the illusion of their active co-operation for the sake of securing their aristocratic influence. Mrs. Densley, who was the wife of a retired lawyer, a well-intentioned woman, and proud of the number of people whom she knew, was in this case the treasurer, and Ella as usual the secretary. The extra labour which had fallen on the girl had no doubt contributed a good deal to her breakdown.

There were operatives at Blackquay, though not at Halstead. And it was a Herculean task to solicit subscriptions enough for the relief of all the children who were pining and sickly in a town in which the mothers had been accustomed to relinquish the care of their infants—handing them over to some aged old crone for a meagre payment per week—that they themselves might resume their place at the carpet works. There were so many children who had been left to their own devices, and who had suffered in consequence, that Ella found it difficult to steel her sympathetic heart against the pleading entreaty that some other ailing little one, hitherto confined to a smoky atmosphere or fed with unsuitable food, should be admitted.

"Our home must be like Heaven," the girl made answer, when I reminded her one day that a business-like committee could never afford to be impulsive. "Do you remember the old adage—the more angels the more room for them? I could never bear to refuse any of those poor little creatures who have been left at home, hour after hour, to lie huddled on straw mattresses, fevered or crippled, without even an encouraging smile."

"Well, devote yourself entirely to the little ones! All the other irons which you have had in the fire so long can manage to be dealt with by other hands now," I said, giving advice which

I knew would be pleasant to her. "Hospitals cannot be dispensed with yet. To the poor they are invaluable."

"That is *something* from you, Dr. Meredith, when you are always talking of striking blows at the subtle causes of pauperism. Doesn't it demoralise the parents to nurse their sick children for them?" asked Ella, with a touch of her former mischief.

"All *in time*—no reforms can be made in a hurry. I would like to increase the freedom of the people as much as possible, and to teach them to help themselves. But when life and death are in the balance before us——"

"Oh yes, I know—your bark is worse than your bite," said this impertinent young lady. And she would not even wait to hear the solemn little exordium which I had prepared for her on the duty of preserving that personal health which should be remembered for the sake of the community as well as the individual. She was to ride on horseback, she was to walk if obedient to my injunctions. I reminded her that Florence Nightingale had broken down from overdoing it, as well as a number of other noble and capable women.

"To be too sedentary is just the way to get headaches, palpitation, and all sorts of miseries—so easy to avoid. But you can walk long distances, you can join in out-door games—you have a fairly vigorous physique," I argued. "No, I am not afraid for you, if you will remember to spare your brains and give ease to your muscles now and then."

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### III.

I CANNOT say that Ella Sinclair proved a good patient. But when I was inclined to be angry with her it mollified me a little to see her at her new work. It was a pretty sight to watch her at her congenial employment. In one thing she was sensible, and proved amenable to my injunctions. For she told me that she had come to see it did not answer to have too many irons in the fire. So she dropped all the other work, and the projects which had once been energetically set on foot managed to do without her, just as I had prophesied.

The children's hospital grew. First a cottage, and then it became necessary to take a larger house. The subscriptions came in apace, and the girl's heart glowed with delight when the thin cheeks of the little invalids filled out, and the eyes, prematurely sad, beamed with joy at the sight of the sea, with its innumerable breakers, and the clouds chasing each other

over the moorland sky. For the society had been ambitious, and the house was well situated, commanding glimpses of the sea and the distant moors.

The rows of little white beds increased, and more nurses had to be engaged. Ella was always finding out that she wanted new things. There were playthings for the children, sent by the people of Blackquay—dolls, work-boxes, and silver thimbles for the little fingers. And, when Christmas time came, there was actually a tree, with holly-leaves and tinsel ornaments, wholesome oranges and biscuits for those who were well enough to eat them, with even chocolates wrapped in silver paper.

I am afraid that the secretary was a baby with the babies. She taught those who were convalescent to sing, and to play at "hunt the slipper." She petitioned all her friends to make patchwork-quilts with odds and ends of silk and stuff, so that the room looked very gay when you entered it, with small pieces of carpets by the little beds. In a short time Ella had her hands so full again that she had no time to suspect how people were beginning to find fault with her childishness, and to accuse her of putting herself too forward. She was always planning something new. One of her plans was to have a laundry on one side of the hospital, where the washing could be done by the bigger girls, when they were well enough to help the others. These also did the mending, and very proud they were of it.

It was like a hospital in fairyland, and Ella the good fairy who presided over it. I was foolish enough to make flattering speeches about her success, forgetting how the personal element should have been kept in the background, and how easy it is for jealousy and pettiness to creep in and spoil the best of works. But it was pretty to see the girl flitting about the dormitories, having a word for every one, and to hear the piping child-voices answering from the sleeping-nests, with texts of Scripture over each of them. (It may be the fashion to be ashamed of texts of Scripture now—why and wherefore I know not—but in these dormitories they were not ashamed of them.) And it was better than pretty to find everything convenient and necessary —always in order—ranged all ready for the doctor's hand.

The pleasure of turning out a good case had no longer to be tempered by the agonising suspicion that a sick child had not enough to eat. Here there was everything to alleviate its pains. I do not know whether Ella was more glad than I was. And then somebody looked suddenly grave about the finances, and more circulars appealing for money had to be sent out.

No one thought of even inquiring whose little white hand it was, aching with fatigue, which toiled over the directions of all these circulars.

Well, a second breaking-down must inevitably have come, had not aid come unexpectedly—aid which was hailed most thankfully.

"Oh, doctor, have you heard the news? It is too delightful!" Ella said, one morning, with a beaming face, when I met her on one of my rounds. It was one of those mornings which always tempted me to walk. Earth and sky were wearing their fairest garments, and the distant sea, with its changeful mackerel-tints, was glittering in the unaccustomed brightness. I had dismissed my carriage, and set out to walk, as I often did, to my patients who were comparatively near at hand.

"I did not like to tell the mother how tired I was feeling," the girl continued excitedly, "and it was on my conscience that I might have to confess to *you*. But Heaven always sends help when it is needed, I think. And *such* a kind letter has just come to me, as if it had dropped from the skies—a letter you know, doctor, from a real earnest worker. I have proposed her name to the committee, and they have put her on it at once. She is actually going to live at Blackquay, and, being a widow with no children, will have all her time on her hands! A really business-like letter! Well, I think I should have broken down without some such offer as this," she added, with a sigh which told volumes. "I cannot make Mrs. Densley understand about those accounts, she keeps me so long over the tiniest details, and then the time is so apt to be taken up with small talk, when there is so much to be done. But now we shall get on splendidly."

And the girl ran on volubly, saying in her eagerness perhaps a little more than she should have said—only I was old enough not to betray her confidences—her words running as it were one into another. I wished afterwards I had reminded her that walls had ears at Blackquay. The little hypocrite! Now that the time had come, she voluntarily acknowledged how near she had been to fulfilling our most dismal prophecies.

I raised my eyebrows and said, "Curious!" and had the grace not to laugh at her till she had passed out of sight. It was not the first time that I had had to connive at those graceful little fictions and amusing little deceptions which are sometimes harmless in families. Did I not know as well as Ella how many wary pretexts that mother of hers was always making to detain the child at home as much as possible? And was I not perfectly aware that when Ella left Mrs. Sinclair to take naps,

as if they were good for the old lady's health, after lunch and dinner, that the anxious maternal eyes never closed any more than hers did, though I had more than once called and found the worthy widow on her cushions, making believe to nod, rather than I should think her daughter neglected her.

She was quiet enough, that elder lady, after her first complaints in my presence. There was a sort of self-restraint in her quietness; she was, as a rule, remarkably self-possessed. But her will was no match for that of her daughter. And I saw that after the first attempt to enlist my sympathy, rather than that any one should be scandalised or think she meant to complain of Ella's devotion to others, she had determined to take the passive line of supposed acquiescence.

"A pity we can't cast these young people into a mould—the idle ones and the over-enthusiastic ones—and pound them up together, turning out a few moderate ones, with sober, practical qualities," I said to myself, as I thumped my stick a little irritably on the gravel, and continued the constitutional which consisted in calling on various patients.

Not that I, any more than the doting mother, wanted any outsider to interfere with Ella. There are no fools like the old ones, and I dare say I was a fool. For, though in cool blood I might have been perfectly willing to admit that the enthusiastic young creature wanted to be taken down a peg, on the other hand she seemed to me to be beyond all rules.

I am sure that neither I nor Jenny, who was like another mother to Ella, nor Mrs. Sinclair, who was always inclined to put the best possible interpretation on other people's conduct, ever contemplated the possibility of offence to Ella when we welcomed Mrs. Wilmott, the lady who had volunteered her help, and who we trusted would be a saving influence in every way to our neighbourhood.

The interval was but a short one before Mrs. Wilmott arrived, with bag and baggage, to take up her abode among us. She said she had not been accustomed to simple country life, but that for the sake of the "work" she would try to adapt herself to it. She lived in the neighbourhood of Blackquay rather than in the town itself. For she averred that among other things she had a pastoral taste. Indeed, one could see with half an eye that she, like Ella, had the gift of believing in herself, and was a clever amateur with a good deal of adroitness at many branches of cleverness. Whether she had more adroitness than Ella remained to be proved.

Mrs. Wilmott was a handsome woman, with a commanding figure, rather under the age of forty, and, as Ella's enemies

whispered, was likely to know a good deal more about things in general than an undeveloped girl of twenty-three.

"Well," I answered, "all the better; the one will be able to supplement the deficiencies of the other."

I could at times be sentimental instead of cynical, and I felt that there might be an admirable partnership between these two enthusiasts. The neighbourhood was soon resounding with the praises of Mrs. Wilmott. She was one of those capable persons who seem born to be leaders—managers of other women, wishing to make everybody else happy, but happy in the precise way in which they may dictate to them. An autocrat much more formidable and patronising than our Ella, whose cloak of would-be dignity was only flung over her childlike impulsiveness! I must admit that Mrs. Wilmott was a new experience to me, and that after my first interview with her I had to look in the glass to make quite sure if I had gray hairs or not upon me. She renewed one's youth to such a humiliating extent that, as one of my Blackquay colleagues told me in high dudgeon, she treated him as if he were about ten years old.

I rarely could find time to be present at a committee, but, when I waived my usual rule, it was wonderful to me to see how the other women feared and conciliated the new-comer, and how the men, who were really young, bowed down to Mrs. Wilmott. As to Ella, with her usual frank transparency, she imparted to the new-comer most of her girlish plans, which never before had been thought crude, and was somewhat astonished, but not displeased, at the tone of graciousness which had a little, just a very little, depreciation in it, with which her confidences were received. Mrs. Wilmott smiled and assented with a sort of mental reservation which would have been easily comprehended by an older woman with a greater knowledge of the world. The kindly mask, which it would be hardly fair to say she had assumed—it was more or less natural to her—did not really hide her somewhat sarcastic disapproval of the methods which had commended themselves to one so immature. And Ella afterwards recollected that she had received rather a cold answer to her warm exclamation, "We shall of course see a good deal of each other!"

It soon became evident that Janet Wilmott's advent had impressed the inhabitants of Blackquay to a most unexpected extent. For the first time they began to pick holes in the plans which had been thought good, and to find fault with the ways of management which had commended themselves to that "raw and inexperienced girl." New rules were proposed and passed by the committee, new tradespeople were to be employed.

Ella came to Jenny one day with tears in her eyes, because some who had served her well were hurt in their minds—hurt and aggrieved at this abrupt dismissal. But it was some time before the girl, whose heart was occupied with the care of the sick children, became aware of the subtle change in the social atmosphere as respected herself.

Insensibly Ella Sinclair had been acknowledged as a fair and graceful specimen of a perfect lady. She and her mother had, as I said before, come to reside among us almost without introductions, and yet the daughter of the poor gentlewoman, who cared so little about society, could, if she pleased, have been welcomed with respect in the stiffest seclusion of the county families. But *now?* She was the same in mind and manners. And yet? Not only were some of the members of the committee cold to her, but more than one gave her a nod of disapproval, instead of the usual pleasant bow, unmollified by her brightness, as she tripped in her brown cloth cloak about the streets of Blackquay on her errands of mercy. Still unprepared for anything uncomfortable, and fearless in her own straightforwardness, it came upon the girl as a sort of shock when some one informed her that a meeting of some sort, called a sub-committee, had been held at Mrs. Densley's house, in which more than one lady or gentleman had declared that, before the children's hospital could be a success, it would be necessary for a deputation to wait upon Miss Sinclair, politely requesting her to resign the secretaryship on the score of incompetence.

Mrs. Densley's house was one of the old-fashioned sort, with low, rambling rooms, having windows in unexpected places, and planted outside with laurels, deodaras, and Wellingtonias, which effectually concealed it from the eyes of the envious. It was a comfortable, cozy habitation, well suited to its kind-hearted mistress, whose aspirations did not exceed the demand for a luxurious sort of English comfort; but it had never lent itself before to any such purpose.

"How *could* she?—how COULD she?" cried the girl, when she heard it, with a bewildered look in her eyes and a colourless face. "As if they did not know I would have got out of their way when they wanted"—and then she made an effort to recover herself and laugh—"without," as she said, with quivering lip, "needing to be either coaxed or bullied."

"I couldn't have believed it of Mrs. Densley," said Ella's informant; "but Mrs. Wilmott is different. Take my word for it, wherever she appears upon the scene she will be No. 1, and will brook no second fiddle."

Ella looked at him with startled eyes. To be drawn into

listening to something which sounded like a coarse insinuation seemed to her a part of her trial. She murmured something deprecatory, while her lips whitened, and then—afraid that her paleness and discomfiture would be noticed—she made an effort to answer :

"I should be sorry to impute such a motive to any one."

"I call it too bad," continued her informant. "They say that you spoilt the children, shook hands with the nurses, and put them out of their proper position. What an indictment! I hope you feel properly guilty."

"Anything more?"

"You are accused of having written letters in which you contradicted yourself, and said sharp things about other people."

"*I* say sharp things!" answered the girl, with the tears springing to her eyes. "I was simply thinking about my work, and—perhaps I wrote letters in a hurry."

"Ah, there you were wrong—you should never write letters in a hurry. Try to remember what was in those letters. But, take my advice, don't worry about it."

"*I* worry!" she retorted again, with dilating eyes ; and then the habit of self-restraint prevailed, and she answered slowly, "surely, if the work is carried on, it does not matter who does it."

The answer was wrung from her without any intention of untruthfulness. She simply meant to be brave. And yet she knew well enough that an offence had been thrust upon her, and that she ought not to have pretended to be so obtuse as not to feel it. Everything swam before her as, with her conscience reproaching her, and almost ready to lay the blame on her well-meaning torturer, she hurried to a house which was always ready for her.

It was a midsummer morning. The scythes of the mowers had but lately swept away the rich, green grass, with its profusion of buttercups and "wee modest, crimson-tipped flowers." There was a gray sky overhead, and soft, warm, quickening drops were falling on the wild roses in the hedges, the profusion of clematis which garlanded the trees, and red poppies already springing among the green blades of corn.

The rain became steady and persistent, falling unheeded on the bright, brown hair and young, agitated face, as, with a drenched and somewhat dejected look, she reached her destination, and walked straight past the maid-servant, scarcely pausing to listen to her answer after she had asked, "Is Mrs. Meredith in?"

"It is such a good thing to have somebody sensible to talk

to," she said, a few minutes afterwards, as her fingers tightened on Jenny's; "mother must not be troubled. I always keep all these sort of worries from her."

I need not tell you how Jenny both comforted and scolded the girl when she declared she felt as if she never could hold up her head again; nor how, at a certain turn in the discourse, Ella freed herself suddenly from her caressing hands, and thrust out her vigorous young arms—almost, as my wife said, as if she would push her away.

"Crying will not mend matters!" she said, with a voice which trembled in her throat; "you must not be *too* good to me! For I have made up my mind not to degrade myself by shedding a single tear. And yet Mrs. Densley seemed the staunchest of all my *friends*."

Jenny did not answer, as perhaps I might have done, that unless people were made of looking-glass, and we could see through to their hearts, we could not always expect to be sure in this world who are friends and who are not. She had more compassion for the girl, sympathising with her sensitive feeling of being "wounded in the house of her friends."

Yet she drew her out a little, and found that she had offended by some of the thoughtless things she had said in one of her letters. A chance remark that Mrs. Densley was slow to take in business details, and that Ella's time was precious, was enough to account for mischief.

I am afraid we men are all alike, hating with masculine cowardice to be drawn into unnecessary quarrels. But I said quietly to my wife, when she told me of the conversation:

"Ah! I thought it was something of that sort. It is always the way with your sex! They are magnanimous enough to forgive great offences, but they treasure up little slights, especially reflections on their cleverness——"

"Now then!——" began Jenny. She was not so active as she was, but she could still stand on tiptoe and try to cover my mouth with her hand.

"Well, I know your crotchets—you got them from Miss Farley! But I am still of Longfellow's opinion. What I value *most* in a woman is not——" I could not finish the hackneyed quotation, for my wife was threatening to stifle me. She only set me free when I gurgled out, "Mind, I don't undervalue intellect. But the girl probably forgets that when good Mrs. Densley was young there was no such thing as higher education for women. She must learn not to tread on other people's corns."

We laughed a little, though it was a painful subject, which

we agreed would have to be broken to Mrs. Sinclair. We were both of us sorry for the latter, knowing that she valued the high esteem in which her daughter had been held. And we could picture for ourselves the false construction which would probably be put upon the story in a place in which the very servants delighted in gossip, and retailed it amongst themselves.

"You will not wait for the deputation," Jenny had said, "you will anticipate them by sending in your resignation?"

"Very well," the girl had answered, "it will be the best way —but, oh! the poor children!"

The worry and trouble of argument was not to be thought of. Even Mrs. Sinclair roused herself to prevent it, and stopped her daughter discreetly whenever the latter was launched into anything like explanation.

"The less said the better," was the advice I had given, supplementing it by my own experience that the psychology of committees surpassed human comprehension. "I have had my own experiences," I told Ella Sinclair, "and I have found 'the committee,' in the aggregate, to be endowed with an independent existence—a creature on which you can never count, and capable of stinging. Its component parts may consist of the most amiable persons, but, collectively, it is a mystery, which I despair of fathoming."

I succeeded in making her smile, and in convincing her of the powerlessness of protest. But a woman does occasionally find a safety-valve in words, and perhaps the self-repression was carried a little too far. For Ella was more out of heart than she let her mother guess. The new work languished after she left it, and then a report got about that she had relinquished it simply because she was tired of it. The poorer people believed she had deserted them willingly, and this was the hardest imputation of all to bear, because she could not contradict it. Yet, in spite of the new burden of that undeserved ill-repute, mother and daughter saw more of each other than they had seen for many months, and spent many happy hours together during that autumn. I sometimes found Mrs. Sinclair with a hot, perplexed face, and felt it difficult to keep from resorting myself to some muscular exclamation when something more unkind than usual had reached our ears about Ella. Yet, on the whole, they managed to seem in excellent spirits.

It was probably only because I was accustomed to watch people in weak health, that I knew how there was a constant pain at the girl's heart, a conscious ache at which even her mother did not guess. Her exclusion from certain circles cost

her nothing at all; the remarks which had been made upon her, still less. But she missed the other occupations which we had judged it wiser for her to give up. And she pined for a sight of the little ones, with something of that almost maternal yearning which is so often latent in girls who talk determinedly of their resolution not to marry. God bless them for their unselfish motherhood!

I reproached myself for my own part in creating the vacuum which had come into her life. For had I not persuaded her to devote herself to *one* object of usefulness, so that other modes of occupying herself seemed to be taken away from her? It was impossible for her to resume them now, so entirely had the tide of opinion turned against her, as it often does in little provincial towns. Ella was conscious of being thoroughly unpopular, though she held up her head as bravely as ever. I remember one day, when she heard of some carping and fault-finding at her expense, she told me how she feared that the act of championship must cost her few friends dearly. There were a few of the kinder-hearted who beamed encouragingly on her as she walked through the streets of Blackquay, with her usual elastic tread and erect bearing. But most of the Blackquay people were easily influenced by each other.

"They are just like a flock of sheep—one following the other," Mrs. Sinclair said to me laughingly one day, telling me how it made her value my wife's little attentions and her numerous kind messages all the more on account of the contrast.

"If that is the way of the world, I would rather have nothing to do with it at all," said the girl, with a flash in her eye.

"We are too apt to judge the world from our own immediate surroundings," answered Mrs. Sinclair, in her quiet way.

"They simply ignore me, and that is the end of it. I shouldn't mind so much, if they had not begun by over-praising me," answered Ella, with another little shrug. "Oh, I *know* now that my motives were not good, that I cared too much for the praise of my fellow-creatures!"

I had warned the mother that the morbid fit of self-reproach would probably come, and being in a way prepared for it, she wisely refrained from answering speech. She knew that there must be a sort of reaction after a state of feverish activity, and that Ella was at an age when little things make life seem to be very hard, and knew also that there was plenty of healthy vitality about the girl, and in time she would think scornfully of the thorns which just then beset her path.

"Come, this will not do," I said one day, when I found the girl busy over some interminable sewing, and noticed when she looked up at me that her eyes were red, with swollen lids.

"Oh, Dr. Meredith," she said, in self-excuse, "I was thinking just then of that dear little child, who lies all the time so patiently on her back—you know, the little girl who was knocked down in the street and run over that day I picked her up—and I was wondering if she was asking for me in those flute-like tones of hers. It is a voice just like the warbling of a blackbird. And you know they found fault with me because I told her fairy-tales—I believe they thought it was wicked of me. But how dull she must be now! She must wonder if I tired of her."

"This won't do at all. I am going to prescribe a good healthy walk."

"I do not want to go—there is my needlework."

"Always this intense way of taking things—always this fear of overdoing it in one way or another," I said to myself. Then aloud, "I shall quote your words against yourself. What are the sewing-machines made for? You are the last person I should expect to be so fond of needlework. Why do you force yourself to do it in this way?"

"Oh, because it is the only thing I am fit for. I am afraid you will think I am given to extremes," she added, a little bitterly. "But oh, if you knew how this idleness seems to goad me and fret me—how it makes me want to do something *dreadful*."

Lots of comforting words rose to my lips, but I kept silence; words oft quoted have generally no effect.

The next time I was called in I had to be sterner than I should otherwise have been, for the girl's appetite had failed her. She had refused to take anything to eat or drink, and this went on until her mother became alarmed. I cannot say that I was, for emotional perturbation of this kind is occasionally succeeded by some such morbid abstinence. It was impossible to suspect Ella of hysterical malingering, and yet she had to be firmly dealt with in the first stages of this weakness.

"So," I said, after I had questioned her, and tried vainly to induce her to take food, "you have changed my opinion considerably about your sex."

"How?" she asked, looking at me with startled eyes.

"Well, in this way: I used to argue after I became acquainted with you that it was a very poor economy not to educate our women, for, the higher the intellectual grade, the greater the range of sympathy. I used to think that a training in self-

control, self-renunciation—such as it seemed to me *you* had—might ward off nervous ailments, ailments which are too often the result of petted whims, of mis-directed aims, of vanity and self-indulgence. But *now* I am undeceived. I see that *you* have no more judicious moral self-control than the most affected of your mincing, cheaply-got-up——"

"Doctor," she interrupted me, sitting suddenly upright, her languid tones altering, "don't abuse my sisters!"

"Ah, I thought I should rouse you," I muttered to myself, regretting the necessity for recourse to a stronger will than that of her doting mother. "Well, why don't you eat like a rational human being?"

"Because I turn from everything. I tell you it is impossible," she answered, sinking again in her chair.

"Of course it seems so, because you refuse to go out. Without the fresh air you cannot hope to have an appetite."

"I cannot walk," she said hopelessly. Her mother's letter had informed me that she complained of an odd sensation, as if her "limbs give way beneath her."

"It is *you* who are giving way," I said, almost fiercely. "An old fellow like I am can shamble and stumble along when he is worn-out with his day's work, and never complain of being tired. And you, a young girl with all your powers about you, to bring this grief on your mother——"

I had thoroughly roused her now. The fire burnt in her eyes.

"*I* bring this grief on my mother, when I love her so that I would give my life for her! When, if I have ever done anything wrong to vex her—as perhaps I did by allowing myself to be too conspicuous on those wretched committees, when my right hand shouldn't have known what my left hand did—if I ever did anything wrong to her, I would gladly atone by any amount of suffering."

"Tut, tut!" I said, "don't talk so impetuously and wildly. It is the impetuosity we must subdue. You know that all this is exaggerated talk. If you had done anything wrong to your mother, you could not *atone;* we leave that to the Superhuman."

She was ashamed again, as I wanted her to be—that shame of her unnatural, unaccustomed self might restore her to the natural self in whom so many had delighted.

"What do you want me to do?" she said, after a little pause. "I know you wish me well. I will try to do it."

The consequence was that that very afternoon I brought one of my own horses round to the house, with a side-saddle which Jenny had long ceased to use, and between us we managed, by half-lifting, half-coaxing, to wheedle Ella on it.

Once on, she kept her seat better than I had expected. The pure air and healthy exercise brought back her appetite. The experiment was repeated, and always with the same success, till her weakness ceased. The healthy colour returned, and the fine outlines of the figure. I never dared to tell her that more than one young fellow inquired from me with some interest who the handsome girl was who was riding my horse. And I did not wonder when they stood to watch her as she passed. For in comparison with the niggardly portion of good looks which Nature had doled out to some of the other girls in the neighbourhood—as if she had become weary of her own dainty handiwork, and so had scamped things — Ella was refreshing to look at. There was nothing poor or mean about her contours, and her form was splendidly developed.

Again, as the spring days came on, I was touched by the air of refreshing domesticity, the wholesome interchange of sentiment to be found at the Sinclairs'. I flattered myself that I had something to do with it. It cheered me somehow. I liked to bask in it now and then, as a pussy-cat basks by a cheerful fire. Having no daughter of my own, I was perhaps all the prouder of my success with Ella. But I trembled a little when —just as the birds began to sing, and the catkins were on the willows with the first shimmer of pale green—the report reached the girl of the threatened failure of her most cherished scheme.

The subscriptions to the children's hospital were sadly falling off. The larger house had to be given up ; some of the little patients were dismissed, and others moved to the smaller cottage. The doubt was about paying even for the rent of the cottage.

Mrs. Wilmott, who, to do her justice, had done her best to hold up the failing hands, and who had worked in season and out of season during the autumn days, had broken down herself as the spring approached. She was said to be unwell and confined to her room, and sent for some doctor from Blackquay. I did not attend her.

Then by degrees it was curious to notice how the quiet, dignified programme, which my little wife with her usual acumen had recommended, had the effect of causing a reversal of the popular sentence which had been passed upon Ella. The magnates of the neighbourhood, who had never entirely cut her, began again to notice her with the old cordiality. The girl winced when a septuagenarian, who had been one of the first to break the news to her, patted her kindly on the arm when he met her one day, saying to her, as if it were intelligence which ought to have delighted her :

"You will see, if you wait long enough, they won't be able to do without you. Everything is going wrong. It is a crushing defeat for the opposition."

"Oh!" said Ella, catching her breath, "did you really think it would please me to hear that? If things are going wrong, it is a terrible pity."

That night, after lying awake for hours, a sudden thought came to her. It was a very strange, unconventional thought, but, as soon as it came to her, her restless limbs ceased to toss, and the balmy odour of blessed sleep overtook her as usual. The next morning she told the thought to me; for she had come to look to me for help in a way which was pleasant to me, reminding how it would have been if I had ever had that sort of daughter.

"Doctor," she said—almost in the tones which she had used before—"I know it will look odd. What do you advise me to do? I will try to abide by your advice."

"*Do?* my dear," I said, after reflecting for a minute, "just what your own heart dictates."

I did not think she would do it, for the matter of that. But you could never reason of Ella Sinclair as if she were at all likely to be guided by those rules which regulate the minds of ordinary mortals. Once let her think a thing was right, and she forced herself to do it in a single-minded way. But I think Mrs. Wilmott must have been, as a genuine Yankee would have said, "pretty considerable" astonished. That lady was getting well enough to be able to receive visitors. And, without saying a word to her mother, Ella put on her simple straw hat, gathered some primroses and violets, the only flowers their little garden afforded just then, and set off to call on Mrs. Wilmott.

The servant did not know the name of the veiled visitor who sent in a few scribbled lines with the flowers, and who, in answer to a peremptory message from her mistress, was sitting a few minutes afterwards by the invalid's sofa.

"I—I felt that one of us must make the first advance, and that it was a shame for me to go on not letting you know how sorry I was you were ill," said Ella, with a faltering voice. "And—if—if—there is anything I can do to help while you are laid aside—my name need not be mentioned at all—but I do so long to visit those dear little things!"

"Why shouldn't your name be mentioned?" asked the other lady.

"Because you taught me a lesson. I ought to thank you for it. I think I had forgotten, in all the bustle and excitement, that I was nothing, and the work could do without me."

There was one of those pauses during which a battle may be fought and won, or irretrievably lost. The throbbing of the girl's restless pulses seemed to be intolerable, and then, very slowly (for Ella afterwards told me all about it), the elder lady drew her to her side, and kissed her.

"Why shouldn't we both be friends and go on together?" she said. "If you trust to me, I can make it all right for you. It is hard to prevent oneself from being too eager; I fail in that way myself. And some of your plans *were* a little immature, though you did not know it. But you are the best worker, after all. We can none of us do without you."

The Children's Hospital has flourished ever since. If you inquire, you will find that Ella and Mrs. Wilmott are co-secretaries, and the former is not only allowed to kiss the children, but there is a report that she is playing false to the Anti-Matrimonial Society, which she once worked hard to organise among the Blackquay young people. Gossip says—not unkind gossip, which we have done our best to put down since Miss Delmott's mischief-making—that Ella Sinclair is actually engaged to Mrs. Wilmott's nephew.

If so, I hope she will continue to live near the Children's Hospital.

# AN OLD MAID'S STORY

## I.

I CANNOT suppose that any close observer of human nature can pass through a long life without being struck by the fact that a certain number of persons seem to possess the ring of Gyges or the cap of Fortunatus. It does not matter which myth I choose, as we have all sorts of folk-lore expressive of the hard reality that a fair proportion of people pass through life almost unnoticed. They are principally women. To an inattentive observer it may seem as if all of them have "willow-pattern" faces, neither dowered with beauty nor particularly ill-looking, and most of them might be of an uncertain age from forty to fifty. Even in their dress they aim at the unobtrusive—perhaps in consequence of the same instinct which prompts certain dust-coloured or leaf-walking insects to assimilate themselves as much as possible to the earth which they inhabit, and so protect themselves from the assaults of predatory enemies. At any rate they succeed. No one turns to look at them. No one admires or pities them; no one supposes that each has "a story," or wonders if each hides a wound beneath the calm aspect and unvarying smile. And yet these women are often the "salt of the earth," and we could ill dispense with them as the moral antiseptics of social atmospheres. They are very seldom gifted. Jean Paul would have classed them among the "dumb ones of heaven" who have secrets which they could tell, and solemn messages to give, but are voiceless when they would give them. The little children love them; the old people value them. And if there is a case of distress, a sick

child to nurse, or a dying person to sit up with, it is generally one of these so-called old maids or "maiden ladies," as we more politely put it, who comes to the front and performs the kind office. We take it as a matter of course; we scarcely thank hem.

Indeed, I feel as if I am over-bold in trying to tell you a story about one of the best of these women—a type of her class—from the simple fact that they are generally excluded from the pages of fiction. However, when I first knew her, Mary Kempe was not old. She might have been about thirty, and I forget whether "thirty" is supposed to be unromantic by younger women, in the heyday of girlhood and very confident in their own attractions. By comparison she was young, being the youngest of three sisters who resided in an Elizabethan house handed down to them from their fathers, with a good-sized piece of ground round it, in which grew in sweet profusion the old-fashioned wild flowers—larkspurs, lavenders, and sweet-williams—superseded now by the stiff "bedding-out" system. The very names of the two elder ones, Eliza and Amelia, seemed to savour of a former generation, when Fielding's works had not been relegated to the bookshelves, and Thackeray was beginning to write. These cognomens had been handed down to the two elder Miss Kempes from a mother and aunt, and were looked upon as a matter of family pride.

Miss Eliza, when I first knew her, was a strong-featured, tall woman, who had never possessed beauty, but was unduly proud of the blood which ran in her veins. There was no doubt about it. She could trace her ancestry back for a few hundred years with the aid of the discoloured family Bible, and felt herself thoroughly able to look down on a parvenu millionaire. She had a dignity of the mechanical sort, belonging to the spine rather than to any qualities of the mind and soul. It was said that when she was younger, and had refused an offer of marriage, her haughty superciliousness had surprised her suitor; she being, in fact, so very poor, and having a hard struggle to do the best for her sisters. Her stoical resolution to show that she could face these inconveniences, meet changes of fortune with the stolidity of a man, and trample tempting things under foot from a stern sense of duty, left no opportunity for any one to sympathise with her. And if it sometimes happened that I, as her medical attendant, could guess at the overwrought nerves and sorely-tried powers of endurance, I should only have been snapped up for the least hint at my conjecture. Miss Eliza was well read, and was said by her neighbours to air her requirements rather unnecessarily. But, if any one happened to be

better informed than herself, to hint at it would only have been to challenge a rebuff.

All the Halsteadians were afraid of her. But nobody loved her or credited her with the goodness which we so hastily assume to be inseparable from tenderness in the case of women. There was only one occasion when I saw her really broken down, overweighted in the race of life. That was when Amelia's marriage had turned out so badly, and the second sister, who had been the beauty of the family, crept back broken-hearted, like a wounded deer, to her old home to escape the cruelty of a drunken husband, whose villainy could no longer be concealed. Miss Eliza would have done anything, short of being underhand, to keep the story hushed up, and Miss Mary's wishes in this respect ran in consonance with those of her sister. They took it as a disgrace to the family when the thing seemed to get known by a sort of magic, and even to be communicated by some strange magnetism in the air. It felt like the unfolding of all their private secrets.

It never occurred to them that, as Amelia did not complain of her own ill-usage, the thing might be smoothed over, or plastered with a few white lies.

"I should be glad if I thought matters could be made to look more favourable to my brother-in-law, but I have not a word to say in his defence," Miss Eliza remarked, with Spartan endurance, even when it was noised abroad that Captain Newcombe had compromised himself in some other manner, placing himself within the clutches of the law.

Not a muscle of the elder woman's face moved, and, if anything, she walked more erect than ever.

"Ours is one of the best families in the neighbourhood, and —we are all in the hands of—Providence," she remarked rather irrelevantly one day when she met me, and I had suggested that some money might be claimed from the husband for the maintenance of the little baby, which would fall hard on the sisters. "We are all in God's hands," she repeated, as if there could not be another word to answer. Yet, though I fully recognised the truth of the pious ejaculations, I felt that human efforts might be used nevertheless.

The sisters did not think so, and the gentle, deserted Amelia never took it as a grievance that fate should have treated her so cruelly. She was destined, as some women are, to be more of a mother than a wife. And I could only rejoice that in her case those offices of a mother to her babe, which involve a fair amount of self-denial, seemed to fill her with an unspeakable joy, to the extent of even making her forget that she had been ill-used.

After a time her health declined; she gradually faded away. But if I were to tell you how Mary managed—with her burning charity, her genius for order, and her readiness to put herself entirely in the background—to prevent her sister from feeling an hour's unhappiness, you would think that I must be exaggerating.

"Helping others!"—that was the secret of the younger sister's life—the reason why she seemed to avoid everything that was evil, because she had never any occasion to restrain the "self" which practically did not count. In all my experience I have never known a life lived so in conscious relationship to the Unseen. From the time I first knew her it was as if she did not want men's compliments to the leaves on the tree, it did not occur to her that her fellow-creatures might notice if she were bringing forth fruit; and as a matter of fact they seldom did.

The time came when Amelia was taken away by the phthisis which so slowly undermined her strength. If she had been a richer woman, she might have prolonged her fragile existence by following the swallows in their flight to milder latitudes. But perhaps the other alternative was the happiest. I remember what a hazy, lotus-eater's sort of autumn it was, with a dreamy light over the moors better than the simmering heat of summer, when Amelia slept like a child in Mary's arms. The distant hills were already powdered with snow, yet the leaves were lingering on the trees, yellow and gorgeous red, hanging by those brittle petioles in which the sap had ceased to circulate, so that one blast of the keener air might detach them from the twigs, and strew the ground with their russet remains. I had just been lamenting that gentle Amelia Newcombe had been unable to join that army of human migrants—not so numerous then as it is now—which hastens to prolong existence under more genial skies, where, as modern scientists suppose, the "bacillus of tubercle" cannot find a fitting home. But I no longer regretted that she could not seek some such foreign sanatorium when I looked at the happiness depicted in the faces of both sisters.

One was—as men say—"dead," though Mary did not know it for a certainty; and I should find it very difficult to describe the eloquence of that smile with which the younger sister responded to the smile half-sad, half-joyful, half-triumphant, still lingering in the fleshy covering so lately inhabited by the spirit. Well, I was but a young man then, and not the least ashamed of my own misgivings as to whether that incident called death did not make such a break in the actual going-on of the human being as to destroy individual consciousness, and therefore the

real individual. I had been busy with speculative science, which can only touch the outer rind of the thing. "What after all do we know," as Mr. Huxley said lately, "about matter except as a name for the unknown and hypothetical cause of states of our own consciousness?" But I thought I knew a great deal.

"So these two are separated. What a sad world it is! Poor Miss Mary!" I said to myself.

Then I was struck by something strange and unexpected—not sad at all—in the expression of her face.

"Hush!" she said, lifting her finger when I tried to speak to her. "Do be quiet a moment. Don't interrupt it."

"Interrupt *what?*" I asked her presently.

"The music—the music!" she answered half impatiently. "Don't you hear it—ebbing away? It began soft and low—now it is louder and clearer. Oh, listen a moment—you must be deaf not to hear it."

I cannot say I listened, but I looked in dumb astonishment at Miss Mary's quiet face in which was such a strange expression, not only of perfect peace but of joyful satisfaction, that I could scarcely believe she was the same homely, unattractive-looking woman whom in spite of all her goodness I had never thought handsome.

Presently she drew a deep breath of full content.

"It has died out as it came," she said. "I know not where it came from—it seemed to fill all the air—and not to come from any particular place. But I never heard anything like it," she continued, as her little frame (did I tell you she was little?) seemed to tremble with vibrant sympathy.

She was so small and so delicate that though I did not for a moment attach any importance to what she had told me—priding myself too much on my platform of strong common-sense—yet I dreaded the exaltation of feeling as likely to be injurious to her, and once more approached, touching the hand which was beginning to be ice-cold, hoping gently to prepare her for the fact that she had been embracing a corpse.

I need not have been afraid for her, for she answered, in a manner which was entirely undisturbed, as if she had just been admitted for a time into a serener world:

"I know she is dead. I knew it for her sign directly the tremulous air grew quiet, and the music went out in that sort of sobbing sweetness, as if she was sorry for me, and yet blessed in her gladness."

Any one who did not know her might have thought her unfeeling, so entirely self-controlled was she in that uplifting of the soul. I expected the reaction to come, but it never did. I

equally expected excitement and irritability, but neither of them appeared. Both of us, as if by common consent, said nothing to Eliza of Miss Mary's strange statement. But I privately determined to watch the latter carefully. Monomania would of course be the name given to what I did not hesitate for a minute to set down as one of the oddest and strangest hallucinations. Well, it may have been so. I can only tell you that I could never detect the slightest symptom of cerebral disturbance. I prided myself on being a careful student of my Shakespere, and the only thing I remember is feeling rather guilty about the "divine William," when I condemned Miss Mary as a foolish woman. I wondered if it could possibly be, as his Lorenzo said, that we cannot hear the most heavenly harmony because "this muddy vesture of decay doth grossly close us in." I thought, too, of that story about the little French Dauphin, and various anecdotes of the same kind, making up my mind to let Miss Mary forget her hallucination by not reminding her of it; while somehow I could not find it in my heart either to blame her or to pity the sister whose tired spirit was no longer to be dragged about by an enfeebled and diseased body.

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II.

THE Kempes resumed their ordinary routine quietly as before, when a few weeks had passed. And when one of Captain Newcombe's relatives, a lady known for her kindness, promised to take the child and make a fair provision for it—though it was a fresh trial to Mary to give the little one up—she parted from it, when she was convinced it would be for the best, with her usual uncomplaining alacrity. She was on the shady side of thirty by this time, and had always been accustomed to think of herself as homely, redeeming her supposed homeliness by kind words and actions. To a single woman of her elder sister's age there was a sort of barrier to unrestrained social intercourse with the other sex. Miss Eliza openly complained of the "bother of having a man about the house," especially after the behaviour of Amelia's husband.

"I am never afraid of anything—do you think a man would venture to speak to *me?*" she would ask tartly, when she tramped with umbrella and goloshes on the road to Blackquay or over the moors.

Well, as Disraeli said, it is the unexpected which always

happens, but I confess it would be scarcely possible to exaggerate our surprise when we heard that a captain in the Indian army was constantly hanging about Miss Mary, and that he wanted her to return to India as his wife. He was a comely-looking fellow, a year or two older than she was; and the mystery was partially explained to us when we heard that he had remembered her ever since her early girlhood, and knew as well as any one how to estimate her worth. How happy she was! The sweet serenity of her glance became a settled expression, and her eyes, which had been so long used to dwelling upon dulness, seemed to be dazzled by the brightness which had come into her life.

She perhaps thought Lawrence Carruthers more devoted than he was, because everything that he said sank deeply into her heart, and she attached more importance than was necessary even to his playful speeches. Happiness is a great beautifier, and she looked almost young, with expectant smiles bringing colour into her cheeks, and light into the eyes which were like gateways for eloquent thoughts. He had leave for six months. And I continually saw them in the autumn when the tangled alleys of the familiar trees were growing bright with changeful tints; in the winter when the hoar-frost was sparkling on the dead branches, and again in the early spring, when tender bundles of velvety leaves, fluffy, curled up fronds of ferns, or pale shafts from buried orchids were bringing a foretaste of returning summer.

Carruthers, who had come in October, was to return to India in April. And then, whether it was from Mary Kempe's characteristic unselfishness, her fear of interfering with his comfort when he might not have enough to keep her, or from a longing desire to test the strength of his attachment—I never could exactly tell. But she said she would go out to him if he were quite sure he wanted her after a few months.

"You know his income is such a small one, and I should be so afraid of interfering with his prospects—I have nothing of my own," she explained to my wife, who remonstrated.

Jenny declared that in our own case we had never troubled ourselves so much about infinitesimal economics. There could be domestic brightness without them, and for *her* part she would never anticipate any intricate emergencies.

"Ah, but you were young, dear," said Mary, shaking her head, "and I, who was never beautiful, *I* am no longer young. If I did not care about a man's comfort—when he is so good to me—how contemptible it would be! When all the time nobody can tell what he can see in me."

"And yet she is building such great hopes on the venture," said Mrs. Jenny, shrugging, in her evident fear of the future. "She is so placid and unassuming, one might think her unsentimental, but it is *my* opinion she is far too good for Mr. Carruthers."

But what could any one do? Especially when a lady said: "I am fearful of squandering all my sunshine. And I do not want him to be in a hurry. He must have time to reflect."

Not that Mary for a moment doubted him! For *I* knew that, so far from being a placid, unsentimental being, she was unusually amenable to those subtleties of fancy which come to complex natures in a state of over-civilisation. Mary had been liable to these fancies even from a child, awakening her to consciousness, and moulding her for after life, but she had also been used to repressing them. On rare occasions one might suspect her of strong emotions concealed—when her voice warmed or her tell-tale lip trembled.

The enormous power of the imagination in creating a second world for us, with its own joys, its own riches, far beyond the dominion of the senses, abridged the interval of waiting for this woman as for others. Sometimes she would be caught by her elder sister gazing into the fire, seeing pictures in the coals, and then—true to the force of habit, with a visible effort to empty her face of any intense expression—she would settle to her everyday, matter-of-fact duties.

For she could not confide in Miss Eliza. The elder sister belonged to that class of women whose hearts are like damps in which it is more difficult to keep the fire of love alive than to prevent its blazing. Little sympathy was Eliza likely to give her in the crisis which was soon to come, shaking the foundations of her trust. In such crises only men and women who are absolutely honest themselves continue to put the smallest faith in each other.

I only heard of it through other people's talk, and you may be sure I hushed them up, and did not like to hear them gossip about it. How one wild morning early in November—when there was a bitter wind blowing, making the noses of the old look red, and even the cheeks of fresh youth pinched, while the ground was dry and powdery, and the dust lay in heaps—Miss Mary herself, who for reasons best known to her was in a state of trembling anxiety, opened the door to the postman, and took into her own hands the letter for which she had been so anxious, tearing it open before the servant and reading it with a start of surprise. And how the sudden gleam of pleasure had faded from her face, and she had seemed to forget that

any one else was present, as she exclaimed, with no tears in her eyes, though they burned with anguish:

"Oh! my life, how shall I be able to bear it?"

I knew that the most inconsolable of all disappointments is that to the affections, when the life-plan is not only crossed, but the heart thrown back upon itself. And when I heard how people whispered that Lawrence Carruthers was wedded to a prettier and younger bride, and that he had broken faith with our Miss Mary just when she trusted him most, I knew it would seem for a time as if all hope for this life was over with her. I could not bear to think of her with that last solace of sympathy gone.

We kept away as much as possible from the little Elizabethan house, for as Jenny, with her instinctive delicacy, said, "We had best seem not to notice—we must leave her alone."

The working men touched their hats to little Mary more reverently than ever as she passed through the village, though the talk had got about that her lover had jilted her. She was not at first much altered. She was not a woman to fret herself or cry, as so many women do, though there is no use in tears, because in their trouble there seems to be nothing else to do. That calmness had for a time left her face which is

> Not life's crown,
> 'Tis all perhaps which man acquires,
> But 'tis not what our youth desires.

But attacked mortally in all her dearest illusions, her belief in human nature and in the happiness of her life, she had still that sort of expression which one sees and admires in the face of a wounded St. Sebastian, or a St. Perpetua, seeing beyond the veil, and knowing that their sufferings, though derided by men, may not be beneath the notice of the Head of humanity.

So Jenny said at least. Perhaps she was too sentimental. But these things are much to women, and, after all, it is the affections which we men value in our wives more than their intellects. No true philosopher would assign a low place to the emotions. I too could see the expression in Mary's yearning, sorrowful eyes which had just then a look full of apprehension, as if she did not know what trouble might come to her next. Bitter words she never trusted herself to utter. Indeed, she could not expend on words the little strength she had to husband for her every day's work.

Other resources except that of the scenery around her she had none, for Miss Eliza's indignant cynicism was just then hard to bear. And indeed, during the months of November

and December, the neighbourhood of Halstead was not calculated to enliven one. The moor seemed to be a place for a thoroughgoing ascetic—the storm its familiar, the tearing breeze its friend. The tourists who came to it during its smiling aspect would have hated the biting wind and the ghastly, blossomless expanse, with ugly bare hillocks and stones on the rugged uplands over which I constantly met Miss Mary struggling on, with her shawl held tightly round her, and that expression as of a saint. I did not like it in the least; the face appeared to be all right, and the frail body all sensibility, as if her mind were mastering matter in a way which was not right and healthy.

I stopped my horse one day when as usual she greeted me with one of her pathetic smiles. For I had heard her cough.

"The air is too keen for you," I said, pulling my horse up sharply, and speaking almost abruptly in my sudden vexation.

For there was a sound in that cough which needed no stethoscope to detect it. And I knew the wonderful strength of will in this frail little physical frame. I knew that she would keep her ailments to herself, and struggle with her disease, and that, when she could no longer combat with its pitiless energy, she would let it do as it willed with her.

Well, there was a little respite during the months of that winter. I had almost forgotten my alarm. She not only weathered the winter, but held out for a part of the spring. The sky was blue, the larks singing, and all the little becks full of water, when at last Miss Eliza sent for me.

The elder sister was unusually cross. For in spite of her irritability she really cared for that gentle companion. I remember how she kept me waiting in an old-fashioned room, in which were shelves covered with rows of apples laid on hay to dry, jars of pickled cucumbers, bags of wormwood which the people round drank as a bitter, and dried coltsfoot which some of the poorer men smoked as a remedy for the asthma. Miss Eliza thought herself a bit of a doctor, and I had more than once had to remonstrate with her for quacking her neighbours.

She was full of a sort of air of professional importance as she apologised for keeping me, and led me into the ancestral sitting-room, where the family Bible with the yellow writing of defunct Kempes, wrapped carefully in a brown-paper cover, reposed in one corner. I remember how oddly Miss Mary seemed to be out of keeping with the profile likenesses of the Kempe family, cut out in black paper, which ornamented the walls, or with a woman crying over a tombstone shaded by a gray willow which was intended as a funeral memorial of some deceased grandparent. I could not help glancing at the old framed

sampler worked by some fingers long since still; at the beautiful old cups and saucers ranged in a big china cabinet which must have served successive generations of Kempes; and at the comfortable-looking arm-chair, with patchwork on the cushions, which seemed to be more in keeping with the delicate little figure, and ethereal-looking face which peeped out of it with the usual smile.

"I am very comfortable as I am, and, if Dr. Meredith can do nothing for me, I am sure no one else can," the invalid was saying, as her elder sister was propounding some most original scheme for getting a fresh opinion from some untaught fellow who supposed himself to have a speciality for curing pulmonary diseases. "Would I object—if he were called in—to meeting him?"

I had hard work to keep my temper and to prevent thundering at Miss Eliza and at the astounding ignorance of the public. As if people cannot take in the simple fact that we medical men have to pass through years of training, gaining experience at the hospitals, reading and assimilating fresh knowledge every day of our lives! And that—if after all our toil we admit we are only touching the fringe of recondite questions—it is not likely that uneducated dolts can compete with us on matters on which they have not learnt their A B C! I felt inclined to take up my hat and rush out of the house. I know, even as it was, that I muttered a fair amount about "charlatans," "donkeys," and "ignorant pomposity." And then the appealing look in Miss Mary's face arrested me. I suddenly remembered that lots of tales were repeated in Halstead, some of them more or less mythical, no doubt, about the home life of these solitary women. And, allowing a good deal for the invention of such "household words," I had very little doubt that the younger sister had to put up with a good deal from the constant interference of the strong-minded elder.

So I checked myself, and even entered into a laborious explanation about the restrictions of medical etiquette, and the self-respect which a man owed not merely to himself but to the whole body of a learned and benevolent profession, of which he himself might be but a very unimportant member.

She submitted a little sulkily, and then I could notice what was more important—how she fretted the invalid by constant mention of subjects at which she should not even have hinted. She meant to be kind in her way, attaching the greatest importance to the fact that sofas and arm-chairs should be made as comfortable as possible, and that people's feet should not be troubled with cold. But she did not hesitate to probe a wound

on which kindly time, with its more tender touch, was doing its best to form a cicatrix, and I could not help remonstrating boldly when she followed me to the door and openly lamented that both her sisters should have shown a readiness to throw themselves away on worthless men.

"Pray don't bring up those things now—you can't think how it may hurt her, even from a medical point of view," I could not help saying, with an energy which startled her. I added that, though her sister was enfeebled in health, she was not at present in exactly what would be called a precarious condition. Much might be done by good nourishment, careful nursing, and her contented mind. For Miss Mary was no longer unhappy. There was that clear shining again in her face which seemed to tell me that, though she was cut off from some of her high ideals, and could no longer toil with active feet in the busy highways of life, yet a blessedness of some kind was already consoling her.

"Don't you understand," said my wife, dropping her voice, "that though she is called to drink the cup of suffering, and to share in the baptism of fire, there is a blessedness in taking part in that sacrifice? Tom, *I* couldn't be good enough!"

I had not the heart to contradict Jenny, or tell her that my friend, Smythe of Blackquay, whom I called in as a consultant, decided that the happy state of the patient's mind was caused by the insidious nature of the disease.

Anyhow, I was thankful for it, and was a good deal annoyed when I found her soon afterwards trembling and panting with suppressed excitement, and a look which was almost agonised in her countenance.

"You should not have opened the window so widely," I said, in a vexed tone, to Miss Eliza.

Turning towards her sister, that lady answered, with a touch of austerity:

"She complained of a stifling pressure in the air. I knew it would be wrong to give way to such a fancy."

It was only when we were alone that Miss Mary told me—with her firm lips breaking into a half tremble, and a strange, unaccustomed vibration in her usually unimpassioned voice—how there had been a little misunderstanding and some mischief-making, but—she had received a letter from Calcutta.

I had not seen her so agitated since Carruthers had left, and I did not need to be told that the letter was from him. She did not tell me its contents, only that it was all a mistake about his being married to any one else, and that the misunderstanding had partly been caused by the miscarriage of one of her

letters—an accident which more often happened in days when postal arrangements were not so exact as they are now. She calmed herself by a great effort and said :

"He did not know of my illness."

"And he asks you to come out to him?"

She answered by a tremulous sigh. For a moment or two the old look of depression was beginning to settle in a helpless way over her face, and then the flash of reaction came. She raised herself up in her chair, and, checking a gasp which was almost a sob, said, with a glance in which a life's devotion seemed to be flashed, and yet with a gesture which had something grand in it :

"I want some one to tell him that I am going on a longer journey—I want you to say it for me, doctor."

"I!"

"Yes, you, if it is not asking too much of an old friend like you. Write and tell him as my medical attendant. My sister is so—methodical—so particular about her dignity, that if I were to add another word I know it would bring a frown into that strong face of hers, and perhaps she would refuse to write it."

"And you cannot write it yourself—you feel it will be too much for you—you want to put these things away from you—they disturb your rest at nights?"

She answered with a quick, emphatic nod. And indeed I saw how incapable she was of any mental effort as she began to sink back upon the pillows, still looking at me steadily with that appealing look.

"Well, and if I consent," I answered, as I had sat down by her side, "because I know how disquietude or any degree of anxiety is bad for your physical state—if I consent, will you make that other message as short as possible?"

Instantly the look of pain and excitement left her face, and in a voice which was scarcely tremulous, though rich with restrained feeling, she said :

"Tell him it will make no difference, for it could never have been after what had happened in this life. Always there would have been between us that sense of faith shaken, trust misplaced. But that there where I am going—where there is no marrying or giving in marriage, no bitterness of recollection, nothing to come between us—I shall look forward to meeting him. It will be better than meeting in India."

Was it my fancy that there was not only pathos, but passion so intense in her voice that it thrilled me as she added :

"Tell him that no true love dies—not even here, least of all *there*."

I leaped up and bent over her, throwing the window open again, and calling Eliza to my assistance. For she was pale to the lips, almost fainting. The unsympathetic way in which the elder lady lamented that the invalid should allow herself to be agitated by so trivial a matter as a letter from that Captain Carruthers, whose conduct had been so abominable, did more than anything else to reconcile me to the apparent oddity of being selected as Miss Mary's amanuensis. I had indeed no alternative, as Mary herself was so evidently unfitted for anything which disturbed her composure.

I should not have related the conversation in such detail, if it had not been followed by an unexplained circumstance.

From this time Mary's health slightly improved. She made no allusion to the favour she had asked of me. And, though the pink spots which are so ominous in her disease burnt hotly on either cheek when I told her the letter was written and posted, she put the subject from that day aside with an evident sense of relief. I heard no more of any sort of trouble. Indeed, people who did not know her might have thought her light or flippant, if they could have heard the bright references which she made to her approaching end.

Every little trinket had to be given away, every little matter arranged for, even to the planting of a flower or the comfort of a pet bird.

"You know the voice has come to me to set my house in order, for I shall die, and not live," she said to me apologetically one day, "and I have such *little* belongings."

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III.

CONFIDENCE is said to beget confidence. At any rate, there was a sort of sympathy between us ever after this lonely creature had confided in me—a sympathy which helped me to divine at once, when I was called to see her about a couple of months afterwards, that something unusual had disturbed her.

The disturbance was so evident, causing a quickened pulse and renewed difficulty of breathing, that I felt bound to touch on some of the subjects which were usually tabooed between us. Had she received another letter from India? Was there any bad news from any of her relations? Was her little niece ill?

Though all these questions were answered in a decided negative, I noticed that there was a scarcely perceptible hesitation in her voice when I said, with a half laugh, that any one might suppose there was some mystery connected with her attack.

"That depends on what you call mystery," she said, stealing a side glance at her sister.

And it was only when we were alone that she said, speaking doubtfully, and with a certain amount of hesitation :

"You have great faith in me—you have always refrained from hurting my feelings when others—kind and good doctors like you—might have blamed me for yielding to hysterical fancies. And, therefore, if I do not answer your questions, it is because I do not wish to tax your faith too much."

"Then there *is* something?"

"Yes—do not tell my sister," and she shrank visibly. "You may accuse me of diseased fancy or anything else you like—but I could not bear to be laughed at."

Giving her a look of reassurance, I assured her I would not tell.

"Then, doctor," she said quietly, with eyes which no longer flitted restlessly in the direction of the door, but looked clearly into mine, "Lawrence Carruthers is *dead*."

"Nonsense!" I said, with difficulty preserving my countenance, as I had promised not to laugh, but feeling secretly annoyed that a fancy so manifestly absurd should have affected the state of her pulse, or that she should so have mistaken my professional indulgence as to think she could gain concession after concession to her wildest imaginations from a steady-going doctor like myself.

"Nonsense," I repeated, "you know that is most unlikely. He is in capital health."

"He *was*," she quietly corrected me, "but you know there was that sort of understanding between us conveyed in my letter that though we could not meet now we should meet hereafter. There is nothing odd to me in the fact that as he was called first he should make it known to me he was dead. It was what might have been expected."

"Nonsense," I repeated, a little more roughly than usual. For, though I had plenty of sympathy for her in her human affections and her aspirations for the future, it seemed tantamount to accusing me of unreason to make a statement to *me* which she might have expected any other scientific man to scoff at.

"Explain," I said, half unconsciously feeling for my tablets

that I might act like a skilful detective and convince her of her absurdity.

But, though she continued gazing at me without the least sign of discomfiture, she only shook her head and said :

"You would not understand me if I tried. And indeed there would be no use in explaining. But I know he died by an accident. You will find what I say true."

I looked at her with increasing incredulity. By this time I had my tablets, and began making entries.

"When did you know this—or think you knew it?"

"It was on Monday night."

"Very well," I said, "this is Thursday morning. We will make an entry of the date. At what time in the evening?"

"I suppose it was about half-past eleven o'clock."

I wheeled round on her suddenly.

"You are in bed then, and the lights are put out. How can you possibly know the time?"

Her eyes opened widely, as if, though she were willing to gratify my curiosity, she was a little hurt at the inquisitorial tone I had adopted. Nevertheless she answered naïvely :

"Because I had just taken my medicine, which the servant gives me at twenty minutes past eleven every night, and because the church clock did not strike the quarter to twelve till some minutes afterwards."

"Humph," I said, with the paper still in my hand and my pencil scratching, almost against my will, because I did not want her to think I attached importance to any such stuff. Still, knowing that my witness had answered rightly as far as the medicine was concerned, and that she could hear the church clock as she lay in her bed, I said, a little more gently :

"The servant had left the room?"

"Yes."

"And what happened then?"

She became for the first time a little confused, with the pink spots appearing on her cheeks. She clasped and re-clasped her hands, opening her lips as if to speak and then closing them again. And then it became evident to me that her confusion was caused by her conscientious desire to tell me the exact truth, and her impossibility of conveying it to me as it had been conveyed to her own intelligence.

"I do not know," she said, after a pause.

"You do not know, and yet on this you base a statement so incredible?"

I shut my tablets with a sharp click, but even my evident wrath had not yet the effect of discomposing her.

She sat with her eyes widely opened, and fixed not any longer on me but on some distant article of furniture in the room. Her hands were clasped together, and the bright spots burnt on her cheeks.

Something in her appearance recalled the mesmeric state. If I had believed in such humbug I might have thought, looking at her, that those eyes were what they call clairvoyant, those ears clairaudient.

"Do you see anything now?" I asked her, after a pause.

"No," she said gently, "I was only trying to recall. But you must not be angry with me if I tell you that when I lie here for hours alone I often feel as if there are presences in the room. I know I am not alone. I know that if my eyes were opened I should see those presences."

"A very natural consequence of lying for hours alone, and letting your imagination run away with you," I answered, not meaning to be cynical, but determining not to show the slightest readiness to accept her story.

Lifting up a brow that was clearer than usual, and looking at me as if she knew what was passing in my mind, she said:

"But on Monday night it was more than that. He stood by my bed—I am trying to remember how—whether I heard or whether I saw. He came to tell me he was dead—I think he knew it would make me happy to feel sure he would meet me when I died. And then, last night, I saw his funeral—perhaps I dreamt——"

Last night! That was Wednesday. I determined to jot it down directly I left the house, fearing to attach too much importance to this fatuous stuff if I should make an entry just then.

Glad to get hold of something more definite, I repeated:

"A funeral!—well, that was a cheery sort of vision—I suppose, at least, you can tell me about that?"

She knitted her brows together with that same effort at remembrance, and said:

"In my sleep—if I *was* asleep—but that is what I want you to tell me—it puzzles me so—I can't make out. In my sleep I seemed to be transported to a warmer place and a brighter climate than this. Yet I heard the sound of a muffled drum and there was a procession of people carrying a bier. They came slowly towards my bed, and I struggled to get up and follow the *cortège*. It was of no use. Something heavy seemed to weigh me down. I could not move, and yet I seemed to see the procession file past me, and I knew perfectly well whose funeral it was."

"Oh, well," I said, breathing more freely with a sense of

relief, "here is evidently a case of one fancy following another. You make up your mind that Captain Carruthers is dead, and then you dream about a funeral—of course a military funeral—with a sound of a muffled drum, or muffled drums, I suppose, because you determined beforehand that the funeral was to be a military one."

I spoke with a sort of facetious scorn, which I found it impossible to keep out of my voice. I took it as a matter of course that hysterical women should be subject to delusions of this sort, but it vexed me a little that a quiet woman, who had hitherto shown such admirable self-control, should in this respect stand on no higher platform than her sisters.

I think she divined my thoughts; for, instead of being angry, she gave me, each time I visited her, one of her quiet smiles, just a trifle trying to my own vanity, since it assured that, so far from being influenced by my opinion, the conviction grew on her that her own inference had been correct. It certainly staggered me a little when the Indian mail came in, with unexpected information about the death of Captain Carruthers. He died from a fall off his horse on the Monday, having been always a reckless rider, and was buried on the Wednesday. The oddest part of the matter to my mind was that the sudden death happened on the Monday exactly at the hour which tallied with half-past eleven o'clock of our English time, Miss Mary in her simplicity never having thought of comparing by the longitude the difference of time indicated by clocks in the neighbourhood of Calcutta and those at Halstead. It was a coincidence, as I tried to say to myself, certainly rather a striking coincidence, which on the doctrine of averages could scarcely be expected to take place more than once in a thousand years. Still there was the loophole of a coincidence.

Dr. Smythe stuck manfully to this explanation of "coincidence," even when I tried to argue with him that well-attested facts should not be rejected because we cannot always see the explanation. At any rate, there was no charging Miss Mary with deceit or imposture, as she had had no communication at all with Calcutta. She was not in the slightest degree disturbed when the news came from India, only repeating quietly that she had known it before.

From this time she suffered no more—she seemed to be past suffering. It was as if she was already partially emancipated from all that dimmed the vision or oppressed the heart. Living, she seemed to have passed beyond the number of the living; and this not in the sense of many other sufferers whom from time to time it has been my lot to attend, and who seem to

have arrived at an insensible state in which they vegetate, but because she seemed to catch the rustling of angelic wings, and to hear harmonies which drowned the sighs of suffering humanity.

I had been present at so many death-beds, at which I had heard anxious questionings as to whether dying persons were really going to see the faces of those they loved; I had been so accustomed to the doubtful answer, "I hope so," "God grant it may be so," that there was something unusual in a tone of conviction which amounted to absolute certainty.

I said something of this to Jenny, who answered indignantly:

"As if our human relationships are not to have their development by-and-by, when you know we are told that, if we don't love our brothers whom we *have* seen——"

My little wife broke off, muttering something about its being *her* opinion that it was because Mary Kempe was waking rather than dreaming, her vision of truth and beauty was infinitely better than ours.

"It was a'most like Heaven," as the servants said, to be in Miss Mary's sick-room. Not that it could ever literally be called a sick-room; for, though the woman looked so fragile that it seemed as if every breath of air would waft her away like a feather, yet in fact it was the fresh air that did her good. And to the last it seemed as if glimpses of this wondrous Cosmos—from the distant moors to the wild-flowers, which had a special meaning for her—were in keeping with the warm thoughts nestling in her heart. Well, perhaps that was not so strange, if, as I have since been inclined to think, what are called phenomena, or the visible heaven and earth, are but the appearance of invisible reality! William Blake, the painter seer, used to say, "I question not my corporeal eye any more than I would question a window concerning sight. I look through it, not with it." He saw, or believed he saw, an innumerable company of the heavenly host, and so, for the matter of that, did our Miss Mary. It would have been cruel for us to have interfered with the intensity of her happiness; in her belief as to the nearness of heavenly things, and of the human beings dearer to her than her own life.

"Because we are absent in body, why should we be absent in spirit? Surely that is setting too great a value on the body! I like to think that I am surrounded by an army of witnesses," she said to me one day, in the presence of Doctor Smythe, who responded with one of his gruffest "Humphs!"

Really he need not have come. For as Miss Eliza's slender resources only sufficed to purchase the necessary comforts for

her sister, I need scarcely say that neither of us took a farthing of remuneration. But some odd attraction—possibly curiosity—seemed to draw him to the "monomaniac." I was tired of arguing with him as to whether she might be pronounced to be merely "original" or "eccentric," or whether her enthusiasm had passed the boundary-line when it might be called "monomania," or an hallucination to be gently tolerated. But I comforted myself with remembering that it did not matter to her an atom what he called her, especially as he himself declared that the majority of men and women had at some time or other in their lives passed the boundary-line of absolute sanity.

"Brain disease is the most puzzling of maladies," was all I could get him to admit, with a determined shake of his head.

Well, she sat out in the garden as long as we could allow it. And then we humoured her by letting her be propped with pillows in her arm-chair, near the window, from which she could see the glories of the sunset. It was on a day late in November when the first sprinkling of snow lay, like a half-transparent white garment, again over the hills and trees, that the summons for which she had been so ardently waiting came for her. They told me that she stretched out her arms, and said, with distinct enunciation, "They are all here," and they showed me the open Bible, where she had been reading. It might have been accident, or she might have done it purposely—the passage was about the "spirits of just men made perfect." She had put a mark against it, as if she wanted us to think of it. She had also left a message that no one was to wear crape for her. A message which worried Miss Eliza, who associated mourning a good deal with undertakers, and the proper depth of blackness for the exact relationship to be mourned for. She positively insisted on giving me black gloves, which, at the risk of being rude, I declined to wear, having a feeling that Mary would disapprove.

I do not attempt to theorise on what I have told you.

"Incredible nonsense!" was all that Smythe would answer when I told him how she died.

"Incredible nonsense," I repeated, "yes, to us at our present stage of knowledge. I don't know that we have any right to say more."

I kept to myself the reflection that to the philosopher in this life everything is more or less wonderful, and that it is hard to draw a boundary-line, and define what is too wonderful to believe. One cannot say that what is uncommon and startling is necessarily miraculous. It may only be beyond the region

of known and ascertained law, but we by no means deny the possibility of undiscovered laws.

I did not quarrel with my colleague about it. I simply relate the facts to you just as they happened, and have never considered it necessary to generalise from such a case as that of Mary Kempe's.

But once in the course of my reading I came upon a passage in More's "Utopia," which, if you will not think it dull, I should like to quote to you. He says, "No part of a man's life is so oft and gladly talked of as his mere death. And that (ye talk about this) nothing can be more pleasant and acceptable to the deade. Whom they suppose to be present among them when they talke of them, though to the dull and feeble eyesight of mortal man they be invisible. For it were an unconvenient thinge that the blessed should not be at libertie to go whither they would. And it were a pointe of great unkindnesse in them to have utterly cast away the desire of seeing and visitynge their friends to whom they were in this life joined in mutual love and amitie. Whiche in good men after their deathe, they count to be rather increased than diminished. They believe therefore that the deade be presently conversaunt amonge the quicke, as beholders and witnesses of all their words and dedes. Therefore they go more courageously to their busines, as having a truth and assurance in such overseers."

THE END

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